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Vol. II.

\$2.50
a Year.

Published Weekly by Beadle and Adams,
No. 98 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK.

Price,
Five Cents.

No. 14.

WILD IVAN,

The Boy Claude Duval.

By Edward L. Wheeler,
AUTHOR OF
"DEADWOOD DICK,"
ETC.



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THE BOY CLAUDE DUVAL.

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"BUFFALO BEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

GOD'S HAND—THE BOY ROAD-AGENT.

Over the Black Hills country, rough, rugged and mountainous, and over the adjacent grazing savannas to the north and nor'west, swept with merciless fury a wild autumnal storm. Not such a storm as we experience frequently out East, but a genuine Western "hurricane," to be found in no other portion of the American continent.

A storm of fierce, shrieking, resistless wind and pouring, beating rain; a storm of flying sticks and stones; thunder roaring and pounding frightfully within the gates of heaven, and jarring mother earth with the shocks not unlike those of an infant earthquake; and most of all those fearful glares and hissing flashes of lightning, so peculiar to the Black Hills country.

It was a wild, terrible night, and one whose inky blackness lent additional horror to the crashing hour.

In a narrow defile between towering, craggy mountains, sheltered from the deluge of rain, a score of men were crouching about a sputtering, sickly camp-fire, that had evidently been kindled out of rain-soaked fuel—a score of men so rough, silent and grim as to seem carved from the dull, dripping rocks around them.

They were clad in the mountaineer's picturesque costume, and were well supplied with belt weapons, while rifles of the latest and most improved pattern stood stacked under a sheltering ledge close by. In face this odd collection of humans were hairy, grizzled and repulsive—in form they were brawny and muscular.

Not a man was there but looked a formidable foe to attack; not a man was there who would hesitate at bloodshed to further his own particular aims. They were a band of desperate, reckless ruffians, the enormity of whose crimes had exiled them from the settlements and mining towns of the far Western border, clubbed and sworn together as brothers, with aims to destroy, rob, plunder and devastate—a veritable, terrible, and sworn Brotherhood of Death.

Around the camp-fire were gathered these Brothers, silent and grim, drawing closer to the struggling blaze, as a gust of wind sent its spray of rain in under the overhanging ledges—a strange group set in extraordinary surroundings.

Through the gorge at their feet dashed a noisy mountain stream, swelling and increasing in size the longer the deluge of rain continued.

Half a mile down the lonely defile, had darkness not obscured the vision, it might have been observed that the walls of the gorge narrowed still more, until they formed the banks of the rushing torrent. It was by wading up this stream, then, that access was obtained to the camp of the Brothers—for at the opposite end of the gorge the passage was blocked by a considerable waterfall, that leaped down from the crags above.

It was toward the rushing stream that the outlaws occasionally directed anxious glances, for as the rain continued to fall, the waters rose rapidly and soon the banks were full to overflowing.

One of the Brothers uttered a curse of vexation as the moments wore by and the storm raged on.

"Why don't the colonel come?" was his growling interrogatory, addressed to no one in particular. "Ther stream's full now, an' ef he ain't past ther rapids, et's gude-by, Bill Blood!"

"Yas, et's time he war here, Wagner," assented a second. "Cuss the storm; s'pose et couldn't 'a' waited till we got through with this business."

"Don't be growlin' afore et's time!" retorted Wagner, savagely. "Mebbe the game 'il slip thru our fingers yit; so thar's no use o' squealin'!"

"An' ef Bill Blood don't cum—?"

"We won't feel like payin' our debts to Red Kit an' his band. I hope no harm has befell the colonel."

"S'posin' thar had? who'd be captain?" demanded a low-browed ruffian, whose name among his evil associates was Blue Bob—and one of the Brotherhood's most cruel and heartless tools, a man upon whose head the hand of time had left the silvered hairs of five-and-fifty winters.

"Who'd be capt'in?" repeated Wagner, grimly. "Waal, ter all events, I'd probably be capt'in, seein' s' I'm lieutenant now."

Down in ceaseless torrents poured the chill autumnal rain; hoarsely roared and crashed the shuddering peals of thunder, and vividly flared and flashed the vivid lightning; while the roar of the furious torrent through Death's Defile only added to the confusion and terror of the wild night.

"I'm afraid et's all up wi' ther colonel, boys!" grunted Wagner, rising from the fire and stepping from under the ledge that he might gaze up at the black, pouring sky, across the face of which zigzag chains of lightning incessantly played. But a furious shower of rain drove him quickly back under shelter.

"Ther stream's altergether ter much ter stem, now, and like 'buff our capt'in's bin washed away."

"Don't b'lieve he'd attempt ter cum thru, wi' sich a storm ter face," replied Blue Bob, lighting a fresh pipe. "Ther cunnel's nobody's fool, an' knows what's what. Bet he's safe in Bear Trail, this blessed minnit."

"I'll bet he ain't!" yelled Sandusky, leaping to his feet, excitedly. "Listen! d'ye hear them?"

They did hear them—two faint yells from far down the channel of the Little Madrass, which the fierce roaring of the elements nearly drowned out—the cries of a human being, who in this furious night was stemming the stream, rushing and bank-full as it was.

"It's ther colonel, by thunder!" ejaculated Wagner, and a dozen or more seized brands from the fire, and, fanning them into a blaze, rushed down the bank to its narrowest limits, where knee-deep in the water they awaited their master's coming—for a fierce and disciplined master was this Colonel Bill Blood over the wild, lawless spirits who comprised the Brotherhood of Death.

Eagerly waited the outlaws, their eyes peering forward into the gloom, their hands ready to help the flood-rider ashore.

And soon within the glare reflected by their torches' blaze, appeared upon the seething surface of the stream, first the head of a horse, with steaming nostrils and distorted eyeballs—then the head and shoulders of a haggard, wild eyed man, who held a bundle of something across one shoulder with his right hand, while his left clung to the mane of his steed beneath the muddy water.

A wild cheer of welcome rung out from the brazen lungs of the Brothers, and three of the boldest sprung into the flood, swam out and pulled the exhausted horse and its double burden ashore.

Once out of water and under shelter of the ledge, the horse and rider were seen to better advantage.

The former was a powerful Mexican beast, with iron-cast limbs and rugged constitution, together with a certain amount of indomitable courage, a point so essential in a thoroughly good horse.

The latter was a man well in comparison with the horse—a large, powerfully built individual, with strong limbs, great breadth of chest, and swelling muscles—a man who under most circumstances would prove a tough customer to handle. His face was effectually disguised, the lower part being covered with a bushy beard—the upper part with a black mask.

The eyes were black and piercing, the lips grimly set and resolute, the hair and beard brown and of extreme length.

As such was Colonel Bill Blood beheld.

His dress was ordinary buckskin, with leggings and moccasins, and a broad-brimmed slouch hat that nearly hid the gleam of his evil eyes from view.

In his arms he carried a heavy bundle, well wrapped in blankets, and this he gave over into the hands of Wagner and Blue Bob, while he threw himself out of the saddle.

"Ugh! this is a cursed fine deluge!" he growled, shaking himself like a great mastiff, and drawing near the sputtering fire. "Come! stir up this blaze, and fetch me some whisky!"

"Hain't hed enough *yet*, yet, eh?" grinned Sandusky, as he piled on fresh fuel, and dispatched one of the Brothers into a cavern in the rocks for the desired beverage. "How in all nations did ye stem the rapids?"

"The devil only knows," was the gruff response. "But for the horse I should be in purgatory ere now, I suppose!"

"Bet ye would. Didn't judge you'd cum thru, on account o' the storm."

"Neither I should, only there's work ahead, day after ter-morrow, which needs our whole attention."

"So? What's ther shape of it?"

"It's an overland wagon train coming into the hills. There are five families, and all are well fixed in the world's goods. Three families are Jews, and have upwards of five thousan's worth of treasure. We must intercept them at the ford of Bell creek, thirty miles this side of the Belle Fourche."

"And you've got Red Kit's gurl?"

"I have. She's thar in yonder bundle. We shall now have the secret of Red Kit's treasure—or *her* life!"

One of the Brothers now came from the cave with a flask of liquor, and tipping it up to his lips, the colonel allowed a goodly portion of the contents to run down his throat, after which he carelessly tossed the bottle into the seething, boiling stream, and it was borne away.

The stimulant seemed to affect him instantly, for he straightened up, and glanced over the assembled crowd with an unwavering eye.

"Are all of Division First present?" he questioned.

"All," replied Sandusky.

"Then we will proceed to business. Wagner—Blue Bob!"

"Yes, colonel."

"Bring the girl here, into the light."

The two ruffians obeyed, dragging the bundle close to the crackling fire.

"Cut away the blankets!" ordered Blood, and his command was quickly executed, and then was revealed to the eager, cruel gaze of the Brotherhood a pretty, girlish form and a fair, sweet face, such as had never been their lot to behold. A maiden of not over seventeen years, lay before them, bound hand and foot, her clear blue eyes staring at them reproachfully, her sweet face shadowed with an expression of pain—her fair-complexioned face, with its crowning wealth of soft, golden hair, and those lustrous eyes as blue as a smiling summer's sky.

The impression made upon the ruffian crowd of spectators at this unexpected picture of loveliness, could not be less than favorable; but they were bound together by a terrible oath as Brothers of Death—no leniency or pity found root in their hearts for the weak and innocent.

And this fair, innocent girl was a prisoner in their power, and they were here, her oath-bound enemies, even though no offense of hers had made them so.

"Aha! my pretty chit!" cried the colonel, his eyes gleaming brightly; "so the waters of the Little Madrass didn't drown you, neither, eh? Didn't know but the condemned torrent would wash us away, at one time; but old Buckskin is pretty sure of foot, no matter where you put him."

The girl did not reply, except by a look of scorn

which flashed from her eyes—eyes that one would not think capable of expressing anger.

Blood saw her compress her cherry lips, and that she was determined to be courageous to the last.

"Oh! you needn't put on any airs, Miss La Rue!" he sneered, his white teeth showing in a disagreeable attempt at a smile. "I have got you in my power, and your life depends on how you conduct yourself. Look around you, and you will behold the terrible Brotherhood of Death, who have held a reign of terror in this country for the last six months. These present constitute the First Division. Four other divisions are scattered about this nor'-western country—two of them within the limits of the Black Hills—and all are under my immediate control and pay."

Alice La Rue shuddered, but remained silent.

"These men," continued Blood, with cool deliberation, "are a banded army of brothers, who are bound by an oath of blood to obey me. They will eagerly do my slightest bidding, because they well know that my labor is alone for the interests of the Brotherhood. Is this not so, boys?"

"Ay! ay," assented the crowd, in one great shout, that awoke no echoes, but was nearly drowned by the roaring of the elements.

"You see!" the colonel went on, triumphantly.

"They all love me as a brother. Now, Miss La Rue, it is my unpleasant duty to ask you to make known to us the hiding-place of the treasure that Red Kit, your father, stole from our stronghold near Silver Lode. You know that it is rightfully ours—you furthermore know just where it is, and *must tell us!*"

"But I won't!" replied Alice, decidedly. "You made my father a prisoner in your den, and when he got a chance to escape, he captured some of your ill-gotten treasure and brought it with him. You killed my poor sister Eloise because she refused to tell the secret—"

"And I'll murder you *by inches!*" hissed the colonel savagely, bending over the helpless girl, and glaring at her with the ferocity of an enraged beast.

"I'll have you cut to pieces and strung on a rope for public exhibition, before you shall cheat me out of that treasure!"

"You may do all of that and more!" replied Red Kit's girl, firmly, "but I shall never—never—never tell you, where to find the treasure!"

"We'll see!" said Blood, grimly, straightening up—"we'll see. Blue Bob, you generally are a pretty fair carver, and carry sharp tools. *Cut off the little finger of that girl's left hand!*"

As this order came from the chief's lips, all eyes were centered upon Blue Bob. He was known to be a cruel, heartless instrument of torture in the hands of the Brotherhood, and was never known to shirk a duty. But the old man hesitated now, and his hand sought his belt, slowly and reluctantly.

"Go on, you old devil!" yelled Colonel Bill, grasping a revolver from Sandusky's belt, and cocking it—"go on, or I'll bore a hole through your thick skull, and throw you into yonder stream!"

Apparently frightened at his superior's harsh language, Blue Bob crawled forward and dropped upon his knees by the side of the fair prisoner.

"Off with the little finger of her left hand!" repeated the colonel, sharply. "No flinching, you old buzzard, but *off with it*, I say!"

Blue Bob bent forward, and then there was a piercing shriek of pain, a grating, crunching sound, after which the old ruffian leaped to his feet holding aloft a severed finger from Alice La Rue's hand.

"Good! Now, will you tell us the hiding-place of the treasure?" demanded Colonel Bill, with a grin of exultance.

"No! no!" almost screamed the girl, her blue eyes flashing, darkly. "You can cut off every finger I have, and then my head, but I'll not tell!"

"We'll see, you young she-cat—we'll see about that. I've handled worse cases than that. You Blue Bob, cut off her foot at the ankle—the left foot!"

A murmur of horror escaped the outlaws' lips. This was even beyond their limit of cruelty.

But the bloody work was not done!

Blue Bob had knelt again, knife in hand, and was preparing for the terrible deed, when suddenly the whole heavens were illuminated with a blaze of heaven's fire, there was a frightful clap of thunder, and a fresh deluge of rain.

Involuntarily the ruffians started forward with a cry of alarm, for they saw Colonel Blood totter away and fall in a heap upon the bank of the stream, blood streaming from a hole in his forehead.

And ere they could reach him the flood with resistless fury had swept his corpse away.

"God's Hand!" a wild voice cried, and turning, the startled ruffians beheld a youthful figure standing in the light of their camp-fire. "Such is the vengeance he hath meted out to your captain, with his fiery hand!"

A boy in years was the speaker, judging from the sound of his voice and the development of his form, and yet the ruffians almost feared to approach him, despite their numbers.

He was clad in a hunter's costume, which had evidently seen considerable service, and was armed with a repeating rifle and belt weapons, all of handsome pattern and finish. A slouch sombrero was set upon the back part of his head, while his face was covered to the chin with a mask.

"Devils an' demons!" cried Wagner, the lieutenant. "Who are you, an' what do ye want here?"

A wild laugh came from the youth.

"I am an outcast, murderer, swindler, thief, rogue and blackleg, just whichever suits you best. I have all the peculiarities of a fiend—as the Boy Fiend I am widely known in some parts of the West. I heard of this Brotherhood of Death, and came to join it; but seeing as Death has been too much for the chief of your Brotherhood, I wouldn't mind filling the position just vacated by Colonel Bill Blood!"

The ruffians held a short consultation together. A captain they must have, but since Colonel Bill's tragic death, none were so eager for the position.

After several moments' rapid conversation among themselves, Wagner turned to the Boy Fiend, and said:

"By swearin' an oath o' allegiance, an' quaffin' a cup o' human blood, you can become our captain. The chance is open ter ye. Blue Bob, bring the drink."

The Boy Fiend came willingly forward, while Blue Bob went on his errand.

He soon returned with a silver cupful of something whose odor proclaimed it to be indeed blood. This he handed to the mysterious youth, who took it without a tremor.

Then in concert with Toby Wagner he repeated the oath of initiation. We will not give it here; it was but a mockery and blasphemous insult to the name of God.

After finishing the oath, and while standing there in the awful roar and din of that pouring night, the Boy Fiend—for fiend he must be to go unwavering through this ordeal—raised the cup of blood to his lips, and drained it at a single draught.

Thus was the Brotherhood in possession of a new chief!

CHAPTER II.

OLD AVALANCHE ON THE RAMPAGE.

SOUTH of the shimmering waters of the Belle Fourche, or North Fork of the Big Cheyenne river trailing along across a vast savanna or level plain, through the mellow sunlight of a beautiful Indian summer afternoon, was an emigrant train, composed of six wagons, drawn by stout and ugly-looking mules, and driven by big, raw-boned bordermen, with three exceptions, these being a trio of Germans, fresh from the Fatherland, who were in the employ of the Jew families, three in number, who comprised half of the train.

Of the Americans there were two families by the name of Stone and Resville, the third wagon being occupied by one Thomas Jefferson Jagers, a very strange and mysterious person, who had obtained

permission to accompany the train. Rare indeed was it when he was seen outside of his "schooner." Seclusion and strict reserve seemed to be a part of his existence.

Of the Stone family there were three—old Grafton Stone, his wife Betsy, and their pretty daughter, Edith, a young lady of about eighteen.

Of the Resvilles there were four—father and mother and two stalwart sons by the name of Hal and Lew.

Of the Jews there were ten in number, but as our story has comparatively little to do with them, we will not tarry for a description.

The whole caravan was in the charge of that veteran guide and Indian-hater of the Northwest, Alva Lanch Hogg, or as he is more popularly known, Old Avalanche; and a better man could not have been chosen for Avalanche was familiar with every foot of the ground over which the route lay.

In company with Colonel Stone, he was riding a little way in advance of the toiling train, as we look down upon them. And an eccentric appearing individual was this same Avalanche. He was of medium stature, with well developed form and clean, wiry, muscular limbs, and looked to be a person of uncommon strength. Though well along in years, he was still supple and active as a man of two-score and five; his skin was tanned to a dusky brown from long exposure to the sun and wind, and in face and general appearance he was as grizzly as grizzly could be. His countenance, cleanly shaven, bore the livid scars of many a conflict; his raven hair reached to his belt-encircled waist; his piercing black eyes still retained the brilliancy of youth. *His ears were gone*, however, which made a defect that would cause him to be recognizable in any crowd, no matter under what circumstances. His dress was buckskin throughout, and he was armed with a handsomely-mounted Evans rifle, and belt weapons of superior pattern. His horse, though a scrawny, gray animal of uncertain age, still bore evidences of possessing immense bottom.

Colonel Stone was a man of five-and-forty years, with handsome form and kindly face; but about his eyes he ever wore a stealthy expression, which could be best defined in the single word, "hunted."

His horse was a handsome thoroughbred animal, and the colonel's ease and grace in the saddle proclaimed him a finished equestrian.

"Yas, I've been over this hayr lattytude, afore!" Old Avalanche was saying, as they jogged along side by side. "Bulls in ther Mosesrushes, yas. Slid down hayr on top o' a hailstarm of thunder'n' lightning, oncet, in pursuit o' a pesky band o' Sooks—durn their ornery pelts! War tryin' ter entwine my fingers inter ther skulp of Old Crazy Hoss, but he'd bin usin' tew much lard ile, an' squarmed away. An' now ther old sardine hes waded ther everlastin' river, an' I'm cheated out o' my vengeance."

"Been to Deadwood, I dare say?" said the colonel, carelessly.

"Yas; reck' I hev. Didn't stay long, though. Hed immeget bizness in ernuther part uv the equator, so I climb onter ther fust breeze that waafted along, an' flew away. Annihilated twenty hundred Injuns that same day, too."

"Phew! Avalanche, that's purty steep, ain't it, now?"

"Zackarier Zebulom, no! Why, thet ain't a circumstance—hain't more'n a flea-bite on ther rump uv an ellefanty. Why, sir, one day w'en I an' my j'int war up in Montany, we war sot onter in ther middle uv a big perarie by fifteen milyun red-skins, all armed wi' clubs and spears, an' sir, for a solid, actooal fact, wi'out stretchin' matters ther billionth part o' an inch, we just cleaned out them ar' heethyan in five minnits, by ther watch—we jest descended onter 'em like a rip-roarin' simoon o' demolition, an' extarminated 'em beautchiful—*fact!* An' et tuck me six years ter bury 'em; buried 'em ter keep ther wolves from chawin' 'em up inter sassinger fodder."

"Wonderful!" remarked the colonel, dryly.

"There won't be many reds left after a while, in the event of such slaughters. But whom do you mean by your *j'int*—a pardner, I suppose?"

"Yas—Florence Night-in-a-gale; never see'd her, did ye? Florence ar' a sp'risin' smart anamile for a goat. Hain't see'd her fer an age, tho'. Guv her a whalin' fer knockin' ther false teeth out o' an old ma'den in Lar'mie the uther day; hain't seen her since."

"I suppose there is no danger from the Indians between here and Deadwood, is there?"

"No; since old Sittin' Bull vamoosed, thar's no reds as dare go on ther war-path. Mought git a dig frum outlaws, tho'. Plenty o' 'em in the Hills."

"Ha! Is that so? I had not thought of them. Do you apprehend any danger?" and the colonel glanced uneasily back at the first "schooner," in which were his wife and daughter.

"Ken't most allus sumtimes tell how fur a mule kin reach wi' a hind fut, till ye let her try!" was the grim reply. "Nuther kin ye most allus tell when ye're goin' ter stick yer fut in a hornets' caboose. Mought git a serenade from the Brotherhood o' Death most any minnit, now."

"The Brotherhood of Death?"

"Yas; never heered o' et, did ye?"

"No—never, to my recollection!"

"Wal, they're jest about ther wust gang o' cusses this side o' purgatory, fer a fight, an' they never take no prisoners. They jest annihilate 'em ter oncet, an' hev it dun with. S'pect Colonel Bill Blood ar' ther cruelest demon o' humanity in these hyar boreal longytoads an' lattytudes."

"Bill Blood!"

The colonel started strangely as this name fell upon his ear; but he controlled instantly whatever emotion it might have caused within his breast.

"D'ye know him?" queried Old Avalanche, eying the colonel sharply.

"Have heard the name, somewhere!" was the brief reply.

"Heerd o' Deadwood Dick, no doubt, too?"

"Yes—heard and read about him. A most remarkable youth, I should say, for this age."

"Yas, Dick's a cuss, bet on that. Now ef I war ter add ter ther great firm o' Old Avalanche & Co., Great Injun Annihilators, wi' a view ter increasin' our destructive an' extirpatin' propensities, I shed scoop in Deadwood Dick. Why, sir, I heern tell as he could scrape ther complexion off 'm a niggero wi' a rifle ball at a distance o' twelve rods. But thet hain't no more'n a drop o' benzeen in er pot o' porridge, ter sum o' ther shutin' ther Annihilation hes done."

"Probably not. For instance, where you slaughtered those fifteen million of Indians, you must have done some extraordinary shooting!"

"Purty fair, yes—purty fair!"

On across the plain toiled the caravan lazily, through the joysoime sunlight, the steady tramp of the mules, the shouts and chatter of the drivers, and the rumble of the heavy wheels, all charmingly adding to the strange, happy spell of nature.

As far as eye could reach in any direction, stretched the boundless prairies, meeting with the blue sky afar off on the smoky horizon. A fresh flower-scented breeze fanned gently up from the south, and as it greeted the nostrils of Old Avalanche he gave a delighted sniff, and said:

"Thet breeze cums frum the hills, I'll bet a skulp. D'ye smell them flowers? *Th m* say Black Hills, sart'in sure. I shouldn't be surprised ef we sighted 'em afore sundown. Bell creek ford ken't be fur off, nuther."

"We will camp there, then, eh? queried Colonel Grafton Stone.

"Not ef this limb o' boreal extarmination knows hisself!" replied the Annihilator, decidedly. "Et ar' a purty ole place fer a surprise by outlaws, so we won't stop *thar*."

"See here!" The colonel grew instantly excited. "You are keeping something from me, gulde. You fear an attack from this Brotherhood of Death?"

"Who in thunder sed so?" demanded the old man, in evident surprise; "not this chip o' extarmination, I'll sw'ar. G'lang, Prudence, ye durned brute!"

And the application of the Annihilator's spurs caused the scrawny, feeble-appearing animal to very suddenly rear up behind, in a manner that caused a yell of laughter to emanate from the drivers.

"Whoa! Prudence, whoa! Condemn the ornery old 'oss! But a fine anamile ar' this self same Prudence, in battle, colonel—as purty a behaved critter as evyer chawed grass. Jest yell Injun in her ear, w'en any o' the heethyan abound in her vicinity, an' ye'll see music—*you bet!* Why, sir, thar was the time w'en we got surprised by Sooks over on Sweetwater plain. We see'd ther skunks a comin' afore they see'd us goin', an' thar war a race, bet yer bussum-studs on that. But one o' ther p'izen imps tuk an notion inter his skull ter send an arrer arfter us, an' et struck fa'r an' squar' in Prudence Cordelliar's tail. Then, oh! Moses in the Bullrushes, ye jest orter seen her, cunnel—ye jest orter seen that horse! Great ham-bone! She give er screech wuss nor ary full-blooded Comanche red-skin, an' stretch this off hind fut o' hers out right suddint-like:—an', cunnel, et's an actooal sworn-to fact, sir—thet kick tore loose a shoe an' sent et like a streak o' greased lightnin' a-whizzin' back thru the air, an' it struck thet Injun an' bu'sted his skull, an' then bounded off an' basted anuther, an' as I'm a live thunder-starm o' demolition, et kept on till et *flooded thirteen Injuns!*"

Colonel Stone could not do better than laugh at the eccentric guide's broad yarn and the grim way in which it was given.

"But laying aside joking, Avalanche, do you apprehend any trouble?"

"Wal, yas," replied the veteran, after a moment's cool deliberation; "I shedn't wonder ef we encountered a small breeze o' difficulty 'twixt hayr an' the Hills, tho' et ar' mighty un-art'in whar. 'Twon't be a bad fjee ter be prepared fer a little skewrup, anyhow."

Acting upon this rather meager advice, the colonel rode back and issued orders to all the teamsters and those within the wagons to be ready for instant emergency, as there was a liability of attack from the mountain outlaws at almost any moment.

As the colonel was busied thus, the eyes of Old Avalanche were never off from him, and the expression of his lips was certainly rather grim.

"Yes! yes!" he muttered to himself, as he saw the colonel turn his horse over to one of the teamsters while he disappeared within the sheltered wagon—"thar's sum devilment afoot, or this 'ere leg o' extermination ar' out o' calkylation. Thar's a purty gal as ever breathed air in thet waggin, an' they're darned keerful not ter let her git a word wi' any one. Ef thet ain't s'picious, I'm no fudge o' puddin'!"

And the old man turned his attention to things in front of him.

The train moved along; fresher and stronger grew the breeze; the prairie became gradually more hilly and broken.

"Thar's anuther dubious leg o' mutton—thet Tom Jagers!" soliloquized the Annihilator, as if taking a mental inventory of those behind him. Ther chap appears kinder friendly toward me, an' yet I ken't anylize him. He's more uv a puzzle than an Injine squaw hitch ter a white man, w'ich ar' harder ter beat than Goldsmith's old Maid!"

The afternoon wore rapidly away; the sun began to sink close to the smoky horizon; far ahead was a dark line, which was suggestive of timber when viewed by the naked eye.

"How mooch far vas ve pe vrom der blace vere we sdop?" bawled one of the German teamsters, growing impatient.

"Shust apoud dree miles unt a half!" returned Avalanche, in excellent imitation.

"Then yonder dark line is Bell creek ford, eh?"

asked Lew Resville, a handsome young fellow of twenty, as he came trotting alongside of Prudence Cordelia.

"Yas, that's the place," the guide replied, his brows knitting slightly. "I'd give a skulp ef we war ten milles beyant thare, tho'. Great Zebulom Zackariah! Bulls in ther Moserushes! look! look! may I be teetotally atomized inter insect fodder, ef thar don't come Florence Night-in-a-gale—my j'int—a part o' ther great destructive Avalanche o' annihilation. Whoop! hurrah! stop the train! ther's haydoogins o' danger ahead, thar!"

The train was instantly brought to a standstill; intense excitement prevailed; every man seized his weapons, and the women screamed in terror.

And all because of the guide's cries, and the appearance of an ugly-looking animal of the goat species, who was swiftly approaching from the direction of the river, its unmerciful bleats becoming more audible each moment.

"Thar! thar!" yelled Old Avalanche, as a band of perhaps fifty horsemen dashed out from the dark line of timber, "didn't I tell ye Florence knows w'at's she's about, every time? Yonder cums either Deadwood Dick and his band, or else the Brotherhood of Death, w'ich aire wuss. Order, hayr! Be lively; swing ther waggins inter a circle; look ter yer pop-guns; git red dy, fer ther's goin' ter be a thunderstarm o' demolition, now. Every man, woman an' brat ter ther frunt!"

Brief and quickly given were these orders, and as quickly were they executed, for now life depended upon speedy action.

And none too soon were arrangements made, for inside of five minutes the enemy had arrived near enough to pour in a deadly volley upon the few defenders who had thrown themselves, in readiness to meet the attack, behind the wagons!

CHAPTER III.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

"HURRA! hooray!" shouted Old Avalanche, who had dismounted from Prudence Cordelia's back, and was petting his remarkable goat, fondly; "sock et to 'em, my cherubs—put in yer work, now, ef ever!"

The volley from the outlaws had been without effect, as none of the emigrants were wounded. But there were full fifty of the terrible Brotherhood—a mixture of whites, half-breeds and full-blooded Indians—and all were armed to the teeth. Avalanche saw this at a glance, and how utterly useless it would be for them to resist; yet they could not submit and be murdered in cold blood; they must fight to the last, and make every bullet a death-warrant.

Fearlessly, in front of the grim savage band, rode a youth clad in buckskin, and masked, but of him the veteran guide knew nothing—only that he was evidently the leader of the Brotherhood in this particular raid.

But there was one pair of eyes that, when they fell upon the boy leader, in a sharp, scrutinizing glance, lit up with a sudden fire of recognition, and the owner of those eyes, Colonel Grafton Stone, could barely repress an exclamation.

"He herel!" was the muttered ejaculation—"he herel! and I thought and hoped that he was dead!"

After the first volley the outlaws reined in their horses to a walk, as if waiting for the emigrants to fire. But a word from Avalanche prevented this action; his keen observation had apprised him that the outlaws were all armed with long-range peapies, and that they were yet safe from being harmed by the emigrants' fire.

But those within the corral stood in readiness for instant action; every man and woman was aware of the peril which threatened them—all hands, young and old, stood with grasped weapons, determined to resist to the very last.

"Well, guide, what's to pay?" demanded Giles Resville, who stood nearest to Old Avalanche, his rifle leveled across a wagon-wheel. "Aire we goin' to git out o' this scrape or ain't we?"

"You've struck me now, Giles—ye've encountered the great thunderstarm o' demolition in 'er deef-kilty, this time. Zebulom Zackariah! et looks as ef thar might be swads o' fun prisently. Luke! thar cums ther dratted galoots, now! To arms! feller-cityzens; ever' one select yer pardner, an' when ye hear me say 'go,' let 'em scoot!"

True enough, the approaching outlaws had again struck their animals into a gallop, but an instant after the emigrants divined their intention. They were surrounding the corral.

"Great whales that swallowed Jonah!" cried Avalanche, as he perceived the move; "it's all up wi' us now, sure's thar's sport in ther toothache. Say yer prayers, fur— Here they cum!"

Having circled completely around the train, at a given signal the enemy now dashed forward, their yells of triumph calculated to inspire the little band within the corral with terror, and to intimidate them for action.

But bravely they stood their ground, and out of the volley of their fifteen rifles they emptied ten saddles, and severely wounded two others of the Brotherhood.

"Good! good! Thet's ther talk thet decides olection! Them's ther kind o' argyment as take, I tell you. Poke et to 'em, b'yees! let 'em scoot!" yelled the irrepressible Avalanche, and as loudly as he yelled there rose a fierce animal scream from old Prudence Cordelia, who was rearing and plunging in the excitement of the moment, and searching for some place where she could escape from the corral.

"Steddy! steddy! old mare! Behave yerself, ye durned brute; none o' yer funny-business 'round here!" shouted the guide, as he fired a telling shot into the ranks of the outlaws.

But, although full a score of them had gone down, and more were falling, the ruffians pressed on.

Soon they closed fiercely in upon the little corral, and with their revolvers mowed down the emigrants one by one. Old Avalanche was the last to fall, and as he went down beneath the fire of the Boy Fiend, a howl of pain escaped his lips—a bleat and a sorrowful whining came from the two faithful, loving animals he had left behind.

When he fell, the terrible battle of death was over. Around within the little circle, between the corraled wagons were stretched the lifeless forms of the emigrants—the Jew families and the teamsters; the Resvilles and the Stones—with the exception of Edith, who was yet crouching inside her father's wagon; and Old Avalanche and Tom Jagers, who had fallen side by side.

Poor Edith! a bound and helpless prisoner within the colonel's wagon, she had, perforce, witnessed the ruthless slaughter, and her pure young heart bled for the defenders, even though she could not raise a hand to defend them or herself.

"They're all done for!" cried the Boy Fiend, looking over into the corral, "so get to work and drag these wagons apart, and secure the plunder!"

And sliding from his saddle, he approached and peered between the curtains of the wagon within which Edith Stone was crouching.

"Hello! here's a girl, as I live! This way, Wagner, here's a prize worth more than all the rest."

The lieutenant quickly came in answer to the young chief's call, and gazed in upon the terrified maiden.

"A gal, true enough!" he exclaimed, his eyes lighting up with admiration. "Cum out here, miss, an' let's get a fair squint at you. By all that's holy, you're pretty!"

"She's bound and helpless," said the Boy Fiend, springing into the wagon. "Some of these emigrants have held her prisoner. What's your name, girl?"

Edith did not reply; she could not, for the horror of her situation held her speechless. Her brain was swimming; she was conscious of all going on about her, but she could not move her tongue to speak.

"Come! come! none of your sulks!" growled

Wild Ivan—for this was the name the young ruffian had given to the Brotherhood. "Speak out and tell me your name, or it'll be the worse for you!"

"Let her alone, chief!" cried Wagner from the outside. "Don't ye see she's too skeered to speak? She'll cum to her oats, by an' by."

"I'll bet she will, when I get her to the camp!" replied the youth, a grim smile wreathing his lips. "Fetch my horse, lieutenant, and I'll be off with her. You can finish the job and return to head-quarters at your leisure. The girl won't keep long in this atmosphere."

"You'd better not go alone, chief!"

"Bah! what have I to fear? Bring me my horse, I say."

The lieutenant replied by bringing the horse close to the wagon, and seizing Edith in his strong young arms, Wild Ivan vaulted lightly into the saddle.

"Fetch everything of value, including the animals, Wagner!" were his orders; then he plunged the spurs into his animal's flanks, and dashed away.

A wild and reckless rider was this strange youth, who had voluntarily placed himself at the head of the Brotherhood of Death, and the outlaws paused at their work of plunder, to watch him speed away over the prairie.

But they had not long to watch, for soon he had vanished from view within the dark line of timber that marked the location of Bell creek ford, just as the setting sun throw her last lingering rays athwart the level landscape.

Then the Brothers turned to their work of pillage. Each wagon was ransacked and plundered in turn, and drawn aside, and then the bodies of the butchered emigrants were robbed of weapons and ammunition, and such articles as were considered of value.

The mules and horses were lined together, and then the torch was applied to the wagons.

Having with this latter act completed their work, the outlaws secured their booty to the backs of the captured mules, and mounting their own animals, set out toward their stronghold.

Behind them they left death and devastation; only two live objects appeared around the ill-fated spot after the outlaws' departure, and these were the old companions of Avalanche in many a stirring battle—the scrawny horse and the ugly goat. Even they did not approach beyond a certain limit. Death seemed to have terror for even them, for they kept at a safe distance from the outstretched stiffening bodies, the mournful bleats of the goat and whinnies of the horse sounding weird and lonely on the prairie, over which the night was rapidly falling, still and black. And it must have been full two hours after the outlaws had quitted the spot, that a figure might have been seen to slowly rise to a sitting posture among the dead, and gaze around through the thickening gloom.

"Wal, by ther great whale thet engulfed Joner, ef this ain't wuss nor ary graveyard at midnight," drawled forth a cracked, wheezy voice. "May I be teetotally annihilated ef I ain't ther only resserected human in ther crowd. Hello! what ther dickens a're them?"

The wagons had burned down to the ground, and the few blazing timbers remaining sent a faint glow around into the darkness, and partly visible within this light were two moving objects.

"Great Zebulom Zackariah!" burst forth from among the dead, "ef they ain't my Prudence Cordellar an' Flor'nce Night-in-a-gale! Here, ye dasted brutes—this way, ye ornery j'int's o' ther Annihilation. Yer pard ar' better 'n six dead men yit. Walk up an' shake."

And Old Avalanche leaped lightly to his feet, while his pets trotted joyfully forward, manifesting their pleasure by loud bleats and whinnies.

"No! ther thunderstorm o' demolition ain't transfiggered inter angelicky yit!" gravely announced the old man, as he patted first one and then the other of his companions, "tho' thar's enuff layin' around loose, hayr, as hes gone ter say ther cattyohasms.

S'pose I mought hev bin an ordained white-winged flutterer afore this, only I tuk er notion ter drap just a minute afore thet young Brotherhood assayed ter plug et ter me. Ah! hum; et ar' orful ter see w'at damage a hail-storm o' destruction kin do. Every consarned one gone to meet Gabbriel, 'cept ther gal, an' thet young ruffian has got her."

Selecting a burning brand from the fire, the old man went carefully around among the dead, a grim expression distorting his wrinkled features, and when he had reached the last body, he turned to the goat who had followed close at his heels:

"It's no use, Florence, my deer; they're all gone along ther river-road tew Jordan, an' we can't do 'em no good, not ef we war ter shed a bushel o' briney tears over 'em. Asides, thar's the gal, an' ef thar's vartue in patience an' porkypines, ther Annihilation firm uv Old Avalanche an' Co. ar' goin' ter resky her, or turn up et's varysome toes in ther attempt. Cum, Prudence, gal, let's be off. Can't stop fer burial now; sum day mebbe we'll cum back an' creamate w'at bones the wolves leave;" and while thus speaking the old man mounted the sorry-looking horse, and followed by his eccentric companion, the goat, rode rapidly away toward the Black Hills, that lay miles away to the south.

We will not accompany him, but will return to the camp of Death which he has just quitted.

Not ten minutes after the guide's departure there was another stir among the dead bodies that dotted the prairie, and again a figure rose to a sitting posture and gazed around. This time it was Colonel Grafton Stone, who had risen as it were from the dead. During the battle a bullet had plowed a furrow across his temple and stunned him, but he had recovered consciousness about the same time Old Avalanche had arisen to greet his animal companions. For reasons of his own the colonel had chosen to be ecunted among the dead, until after the old veteran's departure.

"Ivan has captured the girl," he said, gazing into the gloom in the direction which Old Avalanche had gone, "and that accursed guide has gone in quest of her! Furies take the old wretch! I believe he has suspected more than he let on, all along. If I can only get a word with Ivan, all will be well. I wonder how the boy got at the head of that gang of cut-throats? Can't be that Bill Blood is dead?"

The colonel rose to his feet, and gazed at the dimly discernible bodies lying around him, stark and stiff.

"Betsy has gone under!" he muttered, gazing at his murdered wife, a few feet away.

"Betsy was a pretty good pardner, and helped me take care of the girl; but, then, I suppose she might as well die one time as another. I can't stop to mourn over her, anyhow; I must be off and hunt up Ivan and the girl."

And suiting action to the word, he turned away, and strode off through the gloom.

Hardly had his footsteps died out, when for a third time that night there was a commotion among the dead, and the mysterious Tom Jagers sprung to his feet, and skulked away, evidently in pursuit of the colonel.

After that the scene of the massacre was destined to remain undisturbed, until those sneaking vultures of the prairie—buzzards—and the inevitable snarling wolf, gathered around, preparatory for a grand feast on the lifeless flesh.

In the mean time where were the young outlaw, Wild Ivan, and his fair captive.

After leaving the Brothers to their work of plunder, the youth dashed swiftly away over the plain, urging his steed to the top of his speed. He rode without using the rein, for his arms were clasped closely about poor Edith, who was half-dead with terror, for she realized that she was being borne away into captivity.

"Oh, Target!" the Boy Fiend cried, applying the spurs. "We must get into the Hills before dark."

Then, into the whitened face of the helpless maiden he darted a glance of malignant triumph.

"Ah! my beauty, little I expected to take so rich a prize when I attacked that train, to-day. I supposed you in another part of this hemisphere. Ah! you start; you do not recognize me, it seems! But I know *you*—oh! yes; I never forget a face that I have cause to remember like I have yours!"

"Can it be you—Ivan?" gasped the pallid girl, her eyes dilating with horror.

"Oh! yes, it *is* Ivan, my bird, and you tremble at finding yourself in my power. You well know what mercy you may expect!"

No reply did Edith make—it was not in her power just then.

The flying outlaw now left the prairie, and dashed into the timber that fringed Bell's creek, and in a short time his horse was swimming the deep but narrow stream.

It was when in the middle of it that he heard a shout, and looked back to behold another horseman, masked like himself, riding swiftly down the bank in pursuit.

"Furies! that man is *Deadwood Dick*! What can bring him so far up north? And what does he want of me—the girl? No, by the heavens, he shall not have her!" the young ruffian muttered.

"Hollo! halt there, pilgrim!" came a shout over the water, in the unmistakable voice of the road-agent of the Black Hills—the dauntless, daring *Deadwood Dick*. "Slow up, if ye don't want me to salivate you!"

But Wild Ivan sent back a yell of mocking defiance, as with a mighty leap his steed cleared the opposite bank of the stream, and bounded away among the cottonwoods.

"Oh! so *that's* your game, is it?" muttered *Deadwood Dick*, with a low laugh. "Well, all right. If you think you can show me your heels, so be it. Reckon that gal will be my property before I am many hours older," and urging his own thoroughbred upon the bank, the young Prince of the Road gave him free rein, and away darted the animal, treading the forest aisles with the ease of an old experienced trailer.

Once the timber was left behind, and the level prairie stretched away toward the mountain-capped horizon, then the race had fairly begun.

"On! on! Flash! Do your best now, beauty!" whispered *Dick*, patting his own animal on the neck as he flew over the yielding turf; "extra feed for you, old boy, if you fetch me within lasso's length of yon flying ruffian."

And now it was a race in dead earnest!

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROAD-AGENT GALLANT.

ON—on over the prairie sped Wild Ivan, with his beautiful prize clasped close to his breast, his steed urged down to a dead run under the cruel torture of the Mexican spurs. Nor did he have aught to keep him in the saddle save the stirrups in which his booted feet rested; he seemed a part of the flying animal, so faultlessly did he keep his seat.

And swiftly in pursuit came the young knight of the road, *Deadwood Dick*, his own spirited black urged to his utmost speed. It was a wild, strange race through the shadows of night that began to steal silently over the earth—an exciting race to both pursuer and pursued.

"On! Flash!" spoke *Dick*, assuringly; "you are doing handsome, old boy, and we will soon overhaul this accursed prairie pirate, whoever he may be. But, next to you, Flash, I must own that I would like to own the horse he rides, for it is a well-bot-tomed beast. On, Flash! on!"

And the noble black seemed to understand what was devolvent upon it, for away it bounded afresh, with ears laid back and head outstretched, and eyes gleaming wickedly.

And Wild Ivan, as he glanced back, now and then,

perceived that the road-agent was gaining perceptibly, though yet he was over a gunshot behind.

"Curses on the fellow!" the youth muttered, using the spurs more savagely; "he seems bound to overtake me. Yes, and he is *Deadwood Dick*, and I owe him one for relieving me of my purse on the Cheyenne stage road. I wonder what can bring him so far out of his scene of operations? Maybe it's got too hot for him around *Deadwood*, and he has come up here to sojourn while it cools off?"

Then, the young outlaw cast a malignant glance down into the face of the helpless captive in his arms—a glance so impregnated with evil passions and cruelty, that poor *Edith* shuddered.

"Oh! but it will do you no good to tremble, my fair cousin!" he leered, mockingly. "Nor need your heart flutter with the hope of escape, for I will cut your throat from ear to ear before I will yield you up to this hounding road-agent, or any one, whomsoever. You are mine! *mine*, and you shall see how carefully I will guard you. Only a year ago you refused my offer of marriage—scorned the hand that though blood-stained would have fought fire and all the furies in your defense. And your refusal made me what I am—a boy fiend—drove me recklessly into the depths of crime and disgrace, but I swore to be revenged upon you, and how little I thought the hour of vengeance would dawn so soon!"

"How little I thought of you as being out here in this wild Northwest; but I reckon matters got too hot in Cleveland for the gay and festive colonel. And is that western gallant, *Tornado Tom*, still searching after you? Success to the idiot, if he ever finds you—which he never will."

"Oh! Ivan!" gasped the frightened girl, "you will not harm me—you will spare me, won't you? I never injured you in any way!"

"Didn't you? Well, I and you look at it in two different ways, then. And as to harming you, I'll agree not to do anything of the kind. My revenge will be complete when we are husband and wife."

"Oh! no! no. I cannot marry you. I do not love you—I would not marry you for the world."

"You wouldn't, eh? Well we'll see about it. I think I shall be able to persuade you. Young as I am, I have a faculty of breaking stubborn spirits, that would be a credit to a man of maturer age!"

And the young villain laughed, mockingly, while he urged on his foaming steed, with voice and spur.

On flew the pursued, and on came the pursuer, now gaining rapidly, for when the horse of Wild Ivan had exhausted its endurance and was momentarily losing, the black charger of *Deadwood Dick* was apparently as fresh as at the beginning of the chase. And it was not the intention of the road-agent to spend the entire strength of his animal. Across the pommel of his saddle lay a handsome Evans rifle in the grasp of his gauntleted hands, and more than once during the race had its muzzle covered the flying outlaw, but each time it had been lowered, while an expression of vexation would come into the piercing black orbs of the pursuer. Try as he might, he could not obtain a sight without risking the life of Wild Ivan's captive.

"I am going to venture one shot, anyhow, if it kills or no!" muttered *Deadwood Dick*, at last. "I guess old *Posey*, here, can reach out that far;" and again the rifle came swiftly to shoulder, and the unwavering gaze of the road-agent crept along the sights. The next instant there was a flash and a report which aroused the prairie echoes, and the bullet sped on its vengeful mission.

It struck the arm of the flying outlaw at the elbow, shattering the bone and throwing it out of joint; and so sudden was the shock that with a howl of pain Wild Ivan released his hold upon *Edith*, and she went head-foremost off onto the ground.

Wild Ivan uttered a string of frightful curses as he found his prize slipped from his grasp, but a glance backward discovered that *Deadwood Dick* was bearing down too close upon him to risk dismounting to

retake the girl; therefore, with his pistol-hand useless, nothing remained but flight, and cursing furiously the youth—a human fiend, indeed—drove the spurs deeper into his animal's bleeding flanks, and shot away into the thickening gloom.

Deadwood Dick did not follow further than to the spot where Edith had taken her unceremonious tumble. Here he reined in Flash, and dismounting, found Edith sitting upon the grass, rubbing her head with her hands, which she had managed to extricate from their bonds.

"Hal did you get hurt by the fall?" asked Dick, anxiously bounding forward.

"No, thanks to you—only my head received a slight bruise," replied Edith, faintly. Then, for the first, she perceived the mask upon her rescuer's face, and an exclamation of surprise and alarm escaped her lips. "What! can it be possible that you are an outlaw, too?"

"Well, yes, miss—a sort of one, as men look at it. My warfare, however, is against men, instead of women!" was Dick's pleasant reply. "I am the so-styled notorious road-agent Prince of the Black Hills—Deadwood Dick, at your service."

"And you don't make war against women?"

"Proudly I say no, miss—nor ever did!"

"Then you will let me go free, if I wish?"

"Assuredly, and it will afford me great pleasure to conduct you to whatever post you may name, from which you can find transportation to your home, wherever that may be."

"Oh! sir, I thank you!" cried Edith gratefully. "But I know not where to go. I have no home that I know of. For several years I have been a prisoner in the power of a cruel uncle and aunt, who sold my home and brought me away while my father was absent on a tour through Europe."

"Indeed!" Dick gave vent to a prolonged whistle. "So there has been a plot afoot against you, eh? Who was the young cuss who was carrying you off?"

Edith hesitated. It might not be well for her to make this road-robber her confidant. She was wholly ignorant of the type of a man he was. He might be worse than Wild Ivan for all she knew.

"That was the chief of the outlaws who attacked our train, and massacred the emigrants," she replied, evasively.

"So? I thought Bill Blood was chief of the Brotherhood. But perhaps he has knocked under as all of us shall have to do, some of these days. I fancied you knew this young chief, personally, though I am unable to tell why."

Edith did not reply, only by a shudder.

"I was a witness of the massacre," continued Dick, "but being alone and unaccompanied by my men, I was unable to render any assistance to the train, for it would have been certain death for me to have shown my lone hand where the odds were so overwhelming. But I and my boys are on the trail of this Brotherhood of Death, and it was to visit destruction upon it, that we came so far north. I generally hold forth around Deadwood."

"Yes. I have read of your exploits in that neighborhood," Edith replied. "You have a very charming wife, I understand?"

"Yes, miss;" and Deadwood Dick's dark eyes lit up handsomely—"one of the dearest little women that ever set foot in this wilderness, is my Leone. If I could prevail upon you to go to our 'Castle,' as we call it, nothing could afford me greater pleasure than to present you to her. I am positive you would love my darling when once you knew her."

"Perhaps. I am one to make friends very easy," said Edith, with a smile.

Indeed, no one could very well help being friendly toward Edith, she was so pretty and innocent.

The seventeen years that had passed over her head developed her beautifully. They had perfected her lithe little form into an admirably rounded contour—had imparted to her sweet roguish face the tints of perfect bodily health. Her eyes were soft

and bewitching in their hazel hue; lips ripe and red as a cherry, and hair of chestnut brown, and long and wavy; it is little wonder that Deadwood Dick gazed at her with something akin to admiration—she was so bright and beautiful.

"Without complimenting you, I should say that no one but a heartless ruffian could be other than a friend to you," he said. "But come! night is falling around us, and we must necessarily be moving. You say you have no home. Let me then offer you the hospitality of my home, until you can determine upon your future movements."

Thus spoke Deadwood Dick, as he stood leaning upon his rifle in the gathering darkness; and simple-hearted Edith Stone gazed at him wonderingly. He was so wholly different from anything she had ever imagined a robber to be, that she felt she could freely trust him.

What was this strange fluttering in her heart, when she gazed into those eyes that gleamed so handsomely through the holes in the black mask? Why was it that his presence seemed so pleasant to her, though he was naught but a stranger, whom she had known but a few moments?

Ah! this was a question she could not answer.

"You are very kind, sir," she replied, looking thoughtfully at the ground—"so kind that I fear I shall never be able to repay you. Of course had I another place to go, it would be preferable to me, rather than to go into an outlaw's stronghold. But alas! I see no other way than to accept your kind invitation. In the course of a few days I may come to a decision what is best for me to do."

"Very well, Miss—"

"My name is Stone, sir—Edith Stone."

"Very well, Miss Stone; any time you may choose to leave us, I will furnish you an escort either to Deadwood or Bozeman, from whence you will find trains departing almost every day. Now, then, I guess we had better set out for the Castle. These plains are not safe, once night sets in."

"I am ready, sir, as soon as you cut these bonds that bind my feet."

"Ah! why didn't I think of them before?" and with a sweep of his knife Deadwood Dick severed the cords, and then assisted Edith to her feet. "Now, miss, if you will occupy my saddle, I will walk ahead, and we shall reach the Castle before daylight."

Edith would have offered some objections to his going afoot, only that he arranged the saddle and placed her in it, and then stalked swiftly away into the night. Flash followed at his heels, and thus it was that Edith found herself being borne off under the protection of a road-robber—the last of all men whom she would at any other time have accepted as an escort.

For several hours Deadwood Dick led on without pausing, over broken prairie that finally ended among the mountain foothills, where low, scraggy patches of timber predominated.

Here he halted, and waited for Edith to come up. She saw that the steady march had fatigued him, by the heaving of his chest and the shortness of his breath.

"You should have ridden in my place; or the horse could have carried us both, and thereby saved you so much labor," she said, anxiously.

But he shook his head with a smile.

"Rather than have Flash do double duty, I would undertake the burden myself!" was the reply, "and as for my riding and allowing you to go afoot, that is out of the question. We have not a great way further to go, and then we will be at the Castle."

After a short rest he led the way into a deep and narrow canyon, whose rock-sides rose perpendicularly to a great height. The bottom was covered with heavy timber, through which Flash picked his way easily, seeming to take pains not to go under limbs low enough to harm his beautiful charge.

When hours had passed, as Edith supposed, Deadwood Dick stopped beside a ledge of rocks that towered

ered heavenward, and seizing a rope that dangled down from far above, he gave it a violent jerk, then turned to Edith.

"You will dismount here," he said, assisting her to alight. "Rub Flash down well, Ceripo"—to a dark, dwarfish fellow, who had suddenly emerged from the gloom, "and see that he has proper care."

The man nodded, and led the horse up the pass.

As he disappeared, Edith was greatly surprised to see a large open tub or car descend at her feet, into which Deadwood Dick handed her to a seat.

"This is my chariot!" he laughed, seeing her amazement. "It is a car lowered by means of a huge crane, from the plateau, two hundred feet above. This is some of Cambre's ingenuity. Cambre's my lieutenant, you know."

Edith didn't know, but accepted the explanation with good faith.

The car now began to rise slowly, and continued to ascend for several moments, finally stopping in mid-air. Overhead a huge arm reached out, and to this the car was suspended. The arm now, however, began to swing around, the bucket descended and was safely set down in the center of a large level plateau, on which a reflector from a lamp set in a niche in the mountain-side threw a flood of light.

Edith saw a score or more of men grouped in dots here and there—dark, masked men, and she trembled when she thought of the strange position she was placed in.

"Here we are!" Deadwood Dick exclaimed, pleasantly, as he helped her from the car, "at Castle —, four hundred feet above the plains, high and dry. Come this way, Miss Stone; I see Leone, now, coming to meet me!"

And Edith followed, little dreaming that her advent was to be the cause of much bitterness—of sorrow, jealousy, and pain.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHEROKEE GIRL AVENGER.

"Jim Crow shot a man,
An' shot him all ter pieces,
An' all thar was left o' him
War a cupple little greasers.
So hop along, skip along,
Do just so—"

And here the singer suddenly ceased and peered around him, as if expecting the approach of an enemy. But he evidently found the surroundings to his satisfaction, for he resumed his occupation, whistling merrily.

It was rather an odd scene to which we introduce the reader.

Through the heart of a tree-environed dell at the bottom of a deep mountain gorge, noisily rushed an infant stream of water on its way to the great prairies to the north. A man sat upon the bank gazing idly into the waters, a quizzical expression upon his face.

He was a lank, long individual, well along in life—undeniably a mixture of Yankee and native Missourian, and about as comical a looking genius as one will often meet. Sallow and angular in feature, with hair, eyes and beard all of a decided blonde cast; legs and arms long and unwieldy; and attired in a dress of homespun, fancifully relieved by gay ribbons; such was a pen picture taken at a glance. He was well armed with revolvers, knife and rifle.

His only occupation, as he sat perched there upon the bank, appeared to be watching the water, which rushed swiftly down the gorge over its rough rocky bed, creating weird music that echoed and re-echoed up the dull gray walls that towered on either hand.

"Yas, Chris Columbus diskivered America!" muttered the uncouth individual, reflectively, "an' got put inter ther jeeographies fer doin' it. 'Twar a great lift fer Kit, an' he wore his laurels like an ugly mule wears a sour expression onter his countenance. An' now thet I, Josiah W. Hogg, ex-pluded member frum Legislature, poet o' Powder

River Range, an' own cousin ter Wawkeen Miller an' sech shinin', flickerin' lights o' ther poetical profession as Moar, Shakespear an' Oakey Hall, hev diskivered an infantile streamlet, I ken't see but w'at I shed enjoy ekal honor wi' ole Kit Columbus an' his crew.

"No, thar can't be no doubt but you're ther fust diskiverer uv this riverlet, Josia', an' when ye've fol-lered it tew its source, as Moar sez:

"'Yer fame shall rise ter mount'ins hi',
Whar buzzeth the bee, an' flyeth the fly.'

"A great feller was thet Moar— Hello!"

Josiah suddenly ceased his poetical effusions, as the sound of footsteps greeted him.

Glancing quickly behind him he saw a female figure glide from the undergrowth and approach him. But what was most alarming, he perceived that she carried a cocked revolver in her hand, ready for instant use.

"Holey Jerusalem!" burst from the poet's lips; "who in thunderation ar' this petticoater? An Injun gal, true's Mary hed a little lamb, whose fleeco war white as snow, an' everywhere—"

Fearlessly the girl came forward, and paused by the poet's side, her fierce black eyes glaring down at him in evident anger. She was not a full-blooded Indian girl, but a half-breed, as was apparent from her features and complexion, which was light and clear. In face and form she might have been called handsome, but in her jetty eyes there was a stern glare that was a repulsive feature in itself.

She was clad in the costume of an Indian princess, and wore jewels upon her fingers that must have cost large sums. Her whole attire was characteristic of elegance, and the rifle at her back and the silver-mounted revolvers and scalping-knife in her belt were all of improved pattern and finish.

To Josiah she appeared rather a savage-looking queen, however.

"Ugh!" she articulated, in better English than is generally encountered among the half-breeds, and she scowled darkly upon the hunter—for, despite his poetical mania, Josiah was an excellent hunter and trapper. "Ugh!"

"Yes, ma'am; ugh!" replied Josiah, rising and doffing his hat. "What will your ughship have?"

A startling burst of laughter pealed from the girl's lips, and for a moment her face was lit up by a smile; but the next instant its expression was as dark and stern as before.

"What d'ye larf at?" demanded Josiah indignantly. "What d'ye cum here for—what d'ye want—who on 'arth be you?"

"I am Sue!" was the reply.

"Sue, eh? Any relation ter Eugene Sue? S'pose not. Had a gal once named Sue—she also sued me fer her britches o' promise, an' I cum purty nigh hevin' ter sew boots in a penitentiary, ter boot. Composed a few lines onto her, too, thusly:

"Oh! fickle gal I loved so well,
Thou'rt homeller than a liberty bell;
Yer heart ar' altogether peth,
Ter sum poor man you'll be the death.
But 'twon't be me—it won't be me;
I ain't sich a fool as I uster be!"

"Them lines used her entirely up, an' she died o' Cerro Gordo sperm-oil meningitis—did, fer a fac'."

"Like all the pale-faces, your tongue wags on a pivot," was the half-breed girl's grim comment.

"Oh! ye don't like that style o' ephusium, hey? Wal, here's another. Tune, 'I Want yer be an Angel':

"Oh! I hev got a brother,
Whose name ar' Avalanche,
Kin fight like cross-eyed Injun,
An' screech like a Comanche.
He's scrumpshious on his muscle;
Kin draw the briny tears,
As he sits an' tells ther story
Of how he lost his ears."

"Ugh! worse and worse!" cried the girl. "White hunter a big fool! Better go herd cattle."

"Ken't see it, my—"

"Darling chit o' walnut shade,
Whose beauty God in glory made."

"Ken't see it. A man wif my poetical perpenalties kin do better than herdin' swine an' horned critters; asides, I've disklivered a riverlet here, an' ther fame o' ther thing will emulate me ter a seat in ther Senate. But, by ther way, Miss Susan—hain't related ter Susan B. A., I s'pose? What ar' yer business with me? My name ar' Josiah William Hogg, at yer service—Hogg in all cases being spelt wif two or more 'g's'!"

"Ugh!" The hunter's words seemed to arouse the girl into her old state of anger. "Sue is a Cherokee girl. Her father was a white trader—her mother a Cherokee queen. Sue comes hither on the trail of an enemy—one who has ruined her life and then fled, leaving her with a fatherless babe. Sue drowned the puny brat because it was his. Then she fled from the reservation, to visit vengeance on the head of her pale-face betrayer. You, white hunter, must tell me where he is!"

"Oh! Lordy gracious!" gasped Josiah, in genuine amazement. "I don't know, gal—don't know no more about yer spouse nor did the boy 't stood on ther burnin' deck!"

"Wagh! the white hunter lies! He is trying to fool Sue, because she is a Cherokee. But he shall tell, or she will shoot him, and take his scalp!"

And up came the revolver on a level with the poet's head, much to Josiah's consternation.

"Now, looker heer, gal, thar's no use o' yer gittin' up on yer ears, fer I swow ter gracious I don't know nothin' about yer feller. Tell me his name, an' I'll think ef I ever stumbled across him; that's fair, now, ain't it?"

"Yes, fair," replied the girl, slowly. "You are a man with a long tongue, yet Sue will trust you. Ivan Stone is his name. It is to hunt him down to death that the Cherokee girl left her people and came here where the mountains grow wild, and the pale-faces are plenty."

"Ivan Stone, hey? Wal, gal, I never heerd o' sech a feller; that's true—as the gospel. But as Moar sed—"

"No man frum the 'arth tew sky above
Kin 'scape ther tickle o' vengeful love;"

an' now, ef you'll jump inter harness wif me, we'll hunt up this Stony chap, tergether. I'm sum on ther trail, I tell ye, an' ef ye'll just show me whar ter find this 'coon, I'll show him to you, blamed if I won't. What say you? Shall we enter inter partnership?"

"Hark!" suddenly whispered Sue, clutching the poet by the shoulder; "listen! some one is coming up the gorge. Quick, come into the bushes!"

And without waiting for Josiah to rise, she dragged him across the dell into a clump of underbrush.

"Jeewhitka—" gasped the astonished hunter, but her hand was clasped forcibly across his mouth.

"Sh! not a bit of noise, or Sue will scalp you!" was her warning.

Then they crouched silently in their covert, and waited, the eyes of Cherokee Sue gleaming savagely.

The echo of a horse's feet rung through the gorge, growing plainer each moment, and soon a horseman came into view, riding at a swift gallop.

He was none other than the young chief of the Brotherhood of Death, the Boy Fiend, Wild Ivan!

A startling hiss escaped the half-breed girl's lips, as her piercing gaze fell upon him, and she trembled, violently.

"'Tis he!" she whispered, savagely, "he, the young devil who wrecked my life!"

"Thunderation! is that the weasel? Hold on—just let me put an electric liver-pill inter his constitution—"

"No! no!" Sue checked the impetuous poet's movement. "The time has not come. Let him go. We will follow; we will track the wolf to his lair, and there corner him. Then, you shall see the Cherokee girl's vengeance."

"You're a gosh-dratted fool!" declared Josiah, bluntly. "Not much would I let him slide off that way. As Danyel Webster sed—"

"Send yer bullets fair an' true,
Sock 'em in, cl'ar all way thru!"

which ar' jest w'at I shed do. Let ther cuss escape, an' like's not ye'll never git yer purty eyes glued onter him ag'in. Let me squinchellate him."

"No! Sue has said it. She will follow like a shadow. The white hunter can go with her, if he will hold his tongue."

Wild Ivan galloped swiftly up the gorge, unaware that one of his bitterest foes was crouching so close upon his trail. He had not returned to his stronghold after losing Edith Stone upon the prairie, but had camped in among the foothills until day once more dawned, choosing to thread the mountains by daylight rather than in darkness. And, too, he half feared to return and announce to the Brotherhood the loss of his captive.

Without interruption he was allowed to pursue his way, and when he had vanished from view around a bend in the gorge, Sue turned to Josiah, quietly.

"Come!" she said, her eyes shining in a peculiar way. "It is time for us to go. Will you follow where the Cherokee girl leads?"

"Ter ther death, gal, as ther feller sed when he tied hisself ter ther rear uv a lightning-express train, because he hadn't no money ter pay his fair. As Burns sed:

"Man proposeth and woman disposeth;"

so ef y'u're disposed ter foller that young gentleman I propose ter do likewise. Off brakes, ring ther bell, an' off we go; I'm reddy."

"I will go ahead," Cherokee Sue said; "you follow at my heels, without a word."

"Karect. As Jim Shakespeare remarked:

"On! on ter greet ther battle,
Check wif fire ther foe's advance,
Let ther bullets lip and rattle,
An' ye'll see the cusses dance."

Without reply the half-breed girl stole from the underbrush, and stealthily made her way up the gorge, her soft footsteps arousing no echo—her movements like those of a cat.

Evident it was at a glance that she had been reared in Indian cunning, and care had been taken in her education to make her at home upon the trail as well as off. Her tread was firm and swift, and her carriage proudly erect.

And despite his oddity Josiah Hogg was no "slouch" upon the trail, either.

He handled his huge feet as lightly as did his dusky companion, and his eyes penetrated every recess in the walls of the gorge—his ears were on the alert for hostile sounds.

Thus the two followed swiftly but silently up the gorge through which Wild Ivan had ridden on his way to the stronghold.

"Many horses been up this way last night," said Cherokee Sue, as they passed over a stretch of sand, in which was a confusion of imprints of horses' feet. "Up yonder they take to the creek;" and she pointed ahead to where the walls of the canyon narrowed in to the water's edge. "Rapids up there, too."

"How d'ye know?" demanded Josiah, now dubious as he saw that his calculations of being the first discoverer of the stream were all knocked endwise. "Pears ter me you know a tarnal sight fer bein' an Injun critter!"

"Know rapids up there," was the response. "See foam—that tells. We'll have to wade."

"Thunderation! that's too bad. I allers did hate ter git wet feet."

They soon came to the place where it was customary for the outlaws to take to the stream, and the half-breed girl led the way into the water without hesitation, Josiah finally following suit with many ejaculations and poetical quotations.

The water was only about knee-deep, but very swift and muddy, so that it was with considerable difficulty that a footing was maintained. Several times Josiah went down, sousing himself all over, but Sue kept up boldly.

But the further they went the swifter and deeper grew the stream, the roaring water now reaching to their waists.

Finally the girl stopped, her attitude one of listening—her eyes wild and gleaming.

"What's up?" demanded Josiah, shivering in his cold bath. "Lookin' ter see 'f ye can't find deeper water?"

"Ugh! no! we must turn back," was the low, cautious response.

"There are horsemen coming down the stream."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROAD-AGENT HUNTERS.

OUT upon the boundless prairie, not many miles from where had occurred the massacre of the train, in a little grove of cottonwoods that hid the course of a deep, yawning chasm from view, was a camp-fire burning brightly, around which were grouped two-score of men, attired in the picturesque costume of the frontiersman, and armed with repeating-rifles and handsomely-mounted belt-weapons.

A few were grizzly old borderers, with long beards and wrinkled faces, but for the most part the campers were young men whose ages ranged all the way from seventeen to five-and-twenty years.

He in command was a tall, handsome fellow, with fair complexion, hair and mustache, steel-gray eyes and well-cut features, while his form was strikingly developed in muscle and sinew.

Captain Norris Setan had been educated by an officer of the regular army, and was a perfect scout and ranger, often venturing into danger where older heads would have hesitated to go, but ever coming out crowned with success. It was his quiet boast never to have lost a battle, and he had participated in many, both among Indians and their worse brethren, the white savages who infested the region.

In Captain Setan's command he counted two of the first scouts on the border—Jolly Jack and Scott Sherwood, both of whom were yet in the thirties, and thoroughly experienced trailers, who had won their name in the Lava Beds war.

Jolly Jack was a great strapping fellow, iron-framed and muscular, with a round, beardless face, of jovial expression, brown eyes and hair, and a general disposition of geniality.

Sherwood was a grim, taciturn fellow, who never made many words over an affair; an excellent scout and plainsman, and a thorough good fellow, once you knew him. He was dark of complexion, with an immense sweeping mustache of jetty hue, black eyes and hair, and a moody, grim expression of countenance, that was becoming in him. He now sat upon a long log in front of the fire, smoking his pipe and gazing into the dancing blaze, evidently in a deep reverie. Close at hand was his inseparable companion, Jolly Jack, while the remainder of the men were lounging around in various attitudes.

Captain Norris had just come in from the depths of the timber, and stood leaning against a tree, close to the fire.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to station a guard, boys," he was saying, in his pleasant, cheery way. "To my notion, these prairies abound with roving bands of red-skins, even though Sitting Bull has gone north."

"That mought be, capt'n," coincided Jolly Jack, with a nod of approval. "I saw plenty of Injun signs along the route to-day, though I said nothin' erbout it."

"And I saw the same," added Sherwood, quietly. "I'll vouch that there's plenty o' Sioux in this vicinity. Probably we could not remain here many days without hearin' of 'em!"

"Then we must have sentinels posted!" cried Setan, quickly. "We surely wish to lose no men by the savages, when we shall need them all to complete with our Deadwood Dick. Kellogg, you may choose three men besides yourself, and guard the camp. I will see that you are relieved at midnight."

Accordingly, four of the band were stationed off in the forest, where the light of the camp-fire could not reach them.

Captain Norris paced to and fro in front of the fire, nervously impatient at something, though he spoke not for a long time.

Finally, the veteran Mountain Mike, broke the silence:

"'Bout time we heered from Rivers, ain't it, captain?"

"Yes, past time. We should have heard from him two hours ago. It isn't six hours' ride to the hills, and he has been gone two days. I cannot account for his delay."

"Mebbe he got nabbed on the trail!"

"Bosh! Lem Rivers is too smart to be caught snoozing. He will probably turn up before another day."

"I hope so," growled Sherwood. "I'm tired of this camping down, here and there, waitin' for some one else to spy out the game."

"Them words fits my dickshunary to a capital dot!" added Jolly Jack. "We ain't seen a red nigger, even, ter shie our respects at. It's almighty monotonous to one o' my caliber."

And this expression was manifest in nearly every face upon which the firelight fell.

"I know it, boys," was Setan's quiet reply, "and I don't like it any better than the rest of you. But I have followed Deadwood Dick up into this country for the purpose of capturing him, and obtaining the reward of two thousand dollars, the price offered for his delivery to the proper authorities, at Deadwood: and I'm going to do it, if I have to accomplish the task alone and unaided!"

"Bravo! With that spirit you'll weather yer p'int, and we'll help ye!" cried old Mike, enthusiastically.

At this juncture there was the tramp of a horse's feet, and to the astonishment of the camp, an old grizzled individual, mounted upon a scrawny gray mare, and followed by a vicious-looking billy goat, rode leisurely into their midst, using as little ceremony as though he belonged to the party.

"Hello! who in blazes are you, pilgrim, and how do you come here?" cried Captain Setan, an expression of merriment in his eyes. "Where d'ye cum from, old chap?"

"Whoa-a-a! Prudence, gal; jes' stop, wull ye!" shouted the odd rider, pulling back on the reins with all his apparent strength. "Good mornin', gentlemen! tho' et do appear kinder duskish. Seen anything 'round these parts uv a young, ornery specimen o' Eve's rib, who war kerrvin' off a gal, as war purty as a sunflower in December?"

"No! nothing of that sort has passed this way, during the last two days," assured Captain Norris.

"Hain't, eh? Wal, thet's too bad. Ye see they hed a massyker down hayr, a few miles, thes arternoon, an' me an' the gal got slighted—thet is, warn't killed. A young robber chap carried off ther gal, an' I got kerried off on ther back uv old Prudence Cordelliar, heer. So I'm huntin' for ther lad—Wild Ivan's his name, an' he ar' ther new cheef uv ther Brotherhood o' Death."

"Indeed! this is all news to me. Who are you, old man?"

"Me! What! didn't ye nevyer heer tell o' Old Avalanche, ther Great Injun Annihilator—ther orful, devastatin', destructive hailstorm o' subversion, w'at sweeps like lightning thru these boreal latitudes an' longitoads—ther giant snow-slide o' Nor-

weepy—ther great cantankerous, roarin' hurricane o' extermination? Didn't ye nevyr heer tell o' this great achievement? Wal, sir, I hev ther honer ter be thet same Avalanche—thet same extirpator—thet same unhealthy disease; an' this 'ere's my boss, Prudence Cordeliar, an' thet 'ar's my goat, Florence Night-in-a-gale—both o' 'em j'int's o' ther great famuss meteorical wheel o' Annihilation, thet swoops around like ther secont hand on a three-dollar lottery watch!"

"Hurra! here's a curiosity!" cried Jolly Jack, and a general laugh ran through the ranks of the road-agent hunters.

"Old Avalanche, eh? It seems to me I've heerd of you before, pilgrim," replied Setan; "but I cannot say just where. Who and what is this Brotherhood of Death, of which you speak?"

"Great Zebulom Zackariah! hain't ye heerd about th-m, nuther? Must be ye're strangers in this lattitude."

"So we are, comparatively. Where we have camped, here, ends our knowledge of this northern country. We come from Deadwood City."

"Phew! ye don't say so? Wal, I'll be figgered! What on 'arth fetched ye up hayr?"

"We are road-agent hunters, old man, in search of one notorious rascal and outlaw who calls himself Deadwood Dick. We've chased him up here, and are now waiting for one of our spies to report his whereabouts."

"Moses in the bullrushes! An' ye've got an idee ye're golu' ter capture this Deadwood Dick, hev ye?"

"Yes. Once we find his stronghold, we'll spend a lifetime but what we'll take him."

"Wal, stranger, ef ye coteh that pestiferous galoot, why, may I be eternally blistered wi' ther heat from purgatory—that's all!"

"Why?"

"'Cause how's you'll never lay yer paws onter him—never!" and the Annihilator emphasized his declaration by giving Prudence Cordelia a dig in the side, which caused the worthy beast to suddenly rear up behind, much to the disgust of the goat, who stood in close proximity to the iron-shod heels.

At this juncture the sharp report of a rifle and a savage yell came echoing through the forest aisles.

"By Heaven! the red-skins have attacked the guards!" cried Setan.

"Great ham-bone that dislocated the jaw of old Venus!" cried Avalanche, simultaneously, and the next moment he galloped into the timber in one direction, while the eccentric goat shot off in another.

"Skeered out, by Christmas!" declared Jack.

"Far from it," grimly replied Sherwood. "You might be proud if you stood in that old target's shoes. He's a 'hallstarm,' as he says!"

"To arms! boys, to arms!" cried Captain Norris, and his order was instantly obeyed. "Kick out the fire, and dodge into the gloom."

No sooner said than done; then the road-agent hunters waited breathlessly for the issue.

The wood was wrapped in profound silence.

Not a step was heard, not the rustle of a leaf. A dead blank seemed to have fallen, that was suggestive of imminent peril. Each of the rangers stood with rifle in hand, waiting for the enemy's onset. But no further attack was made, and this deepened the mystery. The night was densely black within the grove; a hundred lurking savages might be concealed within the shadows.

Nor was the least sound heard betraying the whereabouts of Old Avalanche. Evidently he had cleared out, as Jolly Jack had intimated.

"Mebbe it was only one of the guards firing off his gun at some suspicious object," suggested Norris, growing uneasy.

"Mebbe not!" was Scott Sherwood's grim response. "Hold steady, and you'll soon see plenty of Injuns!"

And it proved that his words were prophetic, for a few moments later a flash and a report came from

his rifle, and a shrill screech of pain resounded on the still night.

"That tells the tale!" the scout said, quietly, and so it did, for by the blaze that issued from the rifle barrel, more than one of the rangers beheld a tufted head and savage face, in the gloom among the trees.

The truth was quite evident—the savages were creeping stealthily upon them!

"Keep your eyes peeled, and use your revolvers at short range, boys!" ordered Sherwood, quietly; for Captain Setan was suddenly missing from their midst. "Have you seen the captain?"

"Here I am," Setan replied, from the ground where he lay. "Go on, Scott; I leave you in command."

"In God's name, what is the matter, captain?" the grim scout demanded, springing to Norris's side.

But there came back no answer. The barbed shaft of an arrow protruded from the young commander's breast, and—he was dead!

Sherwood saw this at a glance, and a groan escaped his compressed lips.

"The poor boy is dead!" he said to Jolly Jack, as he arose with tears trickling down his cheeks. "Pass the word to the rest, and tell them to hold firm for his sake. Our lives depend upon vigilance!"

Jolly Jack obeyed, and a general wall went up from the rangers. All loved their brave captain with brotherly affection; most of them had followed his lead for several years, during which time he had been a faithful friend and a fearless captain.

"The boys take it hard," whispered Jolly Jack, as he stole back to his comrade's side. "What took him off—a bullet or an arrow?"

Sherwood did not reply; he was too full for utterance. But his fingers tightened fiercely about his rifle, while his dusky orbs peered into the gloom, searchingly.

And thus matters stood at the end of an hour. Neither the road-agent hunters nor their savage unseen foes changed their position; the darkness was growing even denser; the silence that wrapped the grove was grim and meaning.

Every ranger stood ready for instant action: Sherwood stood by the side of his fallen captain, like an avenging shadow.

"Great ham-bone that dislocated Venus's lower jaw!" cautiously exclaimed a voice, and turning, the scout discerned the form of Old Avalanche standing hard by.

"W'at on 'arth's tuk ther captin' down?"

"He is dead," replied Sherwood, hoarsely—"killed by an arrow!"

"Zebulom Zackariah! is that so? Poor feller! didn't captur' Deadwood Dick, after all. Any o' the rest gone under?"

"No."

"Lucky! thar's about twenty million o' Purple Eye's red niggurs layin' around loose in these yere woods. I killed six by way o' amousement lack hayr."

"Why don't they pitch in an' find what kind o' material we're made of?" queried Jolly Jack.

"Dunno! 'Pears ter me they're waitin' fer a signal, w'at ain't a-comin'."

"A signal?"

"Yas. I shedn't wonder ef I devastated the sun of a gun as war ter give the signal, an' they're waitin' fer him ter be ressereckted."

"Are we surrounded, then?"

"Bullrushes in Moses, yes—on every side. Even this great Norweegan snow-slide o' demolition wouldn't make a punctuation p'int in ther infernal gang."

"Where's your horse and goat?"

"Speet they're outside on ther perarie, waitin' fer ther music ter begin, when you'll see 'em cum dancin' in, like hot peas on a cold griddle."

A rifle cracked at this instant, and was followed by the startling death yell of an Indian. And then there arose upon the air of the still autumnal night, a chorus of fiendish yells and exultant war-whoops,

and a cloud of arrows and volley of bullets came in upon the besieged whites, while from all sides poured a dense swarm of the vengeful red-skins, their howls making a perfect Pandemonium.

"Stand firm, boys!" rung out the clear voice of Scott Sherwood; "make every bullet count—then club your rifles and use your knives. Courage! courage! and we'll sweep the cursed lips from the face of the earth!"

CHAPTER VII.

JEALOUSY VERSUS LOVE.

EDITH STONE, as we have said before, followed Deadwood Dick across the plateau toward a cavernous opening in the mountain-side, little thinking of what misery, jealousy and pain, her coming was destined to cause, or else she would never have shown herself within the road-agent's stronghold. As they advanced, a slender figure came forward from the grotto, and paused in front of them—a wild-looking but beautiful creature, with fair complexion, shining eyes, and waving reddish hair, and a handsomely rounded form—just the one a road-agent could truly worship, and Deadwood Dick sprung forward and caught her in a rapturous embrace, covering the ripe rosy lips with passionate kisses.

"My beauty!" he exclaimed, "I am glad to get back."

"And I am glad to have you back, Eddie; but what female have you brought here?" and the young wife shot an inquiring glance toward Edith, who stood by, a curious spectator.

"This is Miss Stone, a young lady whom I rescued from a young cuss who calls himself Wild Ivan—the new chief of the Brotherhood of Death, of whom I told you last night. Miss Stone, this is my darling little wife—my Leone!"

And as he spoke, Harris gazed at her he loved so well, with proud admiration.

With the two girls standing in his presence, he could see how much prettier, at least, in his eyes, was Leone than Edith, how much more womanly and bright.

"I am happy to meet you, Miss Stone," Leone said, advancing and extending her hand; but there was a ring in her voice that impressed Edith unfavorably. "I trust we shall be friends, for I have none of my sex for companionship—but, then, whom could I ask for more than my Road Agent Richard, her?"

"None other I should say," returned Edith, candidly. "You seem to think a great deal of each other."

"Which we do," assented Dick. "Leone and I couldn't get along without each other. But, come let us go to the Castle, where no doubt we will find food awaiting us, for I am as hungry as a starved wolf."

And off they went arm in arm to each of the girls, the Prince of the Road escorted them through the cavernous entrance into an immense grotto that pierced the mountain with great chambers and cells like a veritable honeycomb. The floor and walls were smooth and level, and the ceilings, far above, were densely hung with grotesque sculptured figures and pendent vines, whose flowers exhaled a faint, delicious perfume.

In the first chamber a long row of rudely-manufactured tables were stretched across the floor, from which two negro waiters were clearing the remnants of the evening meal.

"This is the general dining-room for the boys," Dick explained, as they went along. "Besides, each one of them has a separate apartment for sleeping, as in this grotto there are a hundred or more natural cells, several of which we have arranged into dungeons for the accommodation of prisoners. Look out that you commit no offense so that we shall be compelled to lock you up, Miss Stone"—with a gay laugh.

"Please take that advice to yourself, my charming cavalier," spoke Leone, just a trifle bitterly; but Dick noticed it instantly, and shot her an amused glance, though he made no reply.

After passing through several airy chambers, which were unoccupied, they struck into a narrow passage, turning off of which they entered Deadwood Dick's own suit—four rooms in all and connected by natural archways. The first room was made to answer the purpose of dining-room and parlor, and was tastefully arranged with neat furniture and carpet, while a bright fire burned to one side, the smoke escaping through a hole overhead.

While Leone was in the adjoining apartment preparing the evening repast, Deadwood Dick seated himself and chatted pleasantly with Edith. He explained to her the interesting points of their wild aerial retreat; also that it could be reached only by two routes—one by coming up in the car, and the other by a precipitous rugged mountain-path that led ten miles before debouching among the lower gorges.

Edith in turn narrated a few events of her westward journey; and the longer she conversed with the gentlemanly young road-agent, the more favorably she was impressed with his appearance.

Their *le-a-tete* was at length interrupted by the announcement that supper was ready, by one of the colored waiters.

Graciously Deadwood Dick conducted Edith to the white-spread table, taking a seat directly opposite. A repast of corn-bread, roast venison, and light wine was upon the board, in addition to fruit and sweetcake, much to Edith's surprise, for she little expected to find these luxuries in a road-agent's camp.

"Where is Leone, Sam?" asked Dick, quickly noticing the absence of his wife.

"Dunno, Mars'r Dick," replied the negro, with a grin, "s'pec' she's done gone off to her room a-cryin', sar!"

"Cryin'?" Deadwood Dick was out of his chair in a twinkling. "What in the dence was she crying about?"

"Couldn't say, mars'r," was the reply, but the man gave a glance toward Edith that our hero comprehended instantly.

"Oh!" he said, "I guess I know. You will please excuse me, Miss Stone, while I go and fetch back the truant."

"Certainly," replied Edith, and then he hurried away.

Edith saw with her keen perception how matters lay. Leone was jealous of the attention her husband had innocently paid to her, a stranger, as a due courtesy to a guest. Of this there could be no doubt. And yet Edith could not see what cause her hostess had to be jealous. She had no more than expressed her honest gratitude to Deadwood Dick for saving her from a horrible fate, to which she would have undoubtedly been consigned had Wild Ivan succeeded in carrying her to his stronghold.

And if it was all that had fired the passions of the little wife, was she to blame?

Deadwood Dick hastened toward Leone's room, a pained and yet amused expression about his mouth.

"The little jealous cat," he muttered; "if this is the way matters are going I shall be sorry—"

He pushed into Leone's chamber, which was tastily furnished and hung. A bed stood in one corner, but Leone was not upon it, as he had expected. Neither was she in the room.

"This is strange," Dick muttered, quitting the place, and running along a passage that led to the general rendezvous chamber of the road-agents. "I don't see where she can have gone."

In the main room a number of the band were gathered about the tables, engaged at a game of cards.

"Has my wife passed this way toward the plateau, Cambre?" was the question Dick put to the lieutenant, in some alarm.

"No, captain. Has not been in this direction since you went in with her and the other gal," replied Cambre, respectfully.

The young chief turned back, a frown visible upon his brow, for he had removed his mask on reaching the plateau.

"I've half a notion to let her get over her sulks, and return when she pleases, dashed if I ain't!" he muttered; but then tender remembrances flashed across his mind, and with a pain of anxiety tugging at his heart he kept on.

One after another of the grotto honeycombs he explored, by the aid of a blazing torch, and at last, in the remotest one of the whole lot, he found the object of his search—Leone!

She was lying prostrate upon the cold, damp, rocky floor, enveloped in a cloak of furs, and sobbing bitterly, her little figure violently agitated with her emotion.

Harris knelt by her side and placed his hand gently upon the throbbing head—the little head with its wealth of brick-hued hair he loved so well.

"Leone!" he said, tenderly, "what is the matter? Why have you come here in this damp, lonesome place, crying? Come! let me help you up, and then you must tell me the cause of your grief."

There was no answer—only the prostrate girl sobbed the harder. And sitting there by her side, Deadwood Dick cursed himself for not having allowed Ivan Stone to carry off his prize. But he reproached himself the next moment, when he thought of the sweet, gentle, confiding maiden he had just left. Still she was nothing to him—not a millionth part as much as his jealous little darling here, who lay sobbing before him.

"Come, darling," he continued, raising her head and shoulders into his arms, and kissing away the tears that trickled down the whitened cheeks, "look up, won't you? Don't cry so. What have I done? Are you jealous because I chatted with that stranger? Oh! Leone! you shouldn't be, for you know that I love you better than my life—that I worship the very ground you—"

"Stop!" she cried, so suddenly that he was startled. She had struggled from his arms to her feet, now; her tears had ceased to fall; she stood there, with white, pensive face and shining eyes, and he wondered that he had never known how royally beautiful she was before. "Stop, Edward Harris!" she repeated, sternly; "let this matter drop here. You return to your supper."

Then she turned and swept away.

Dick did not attempt to follow her this time, but took another route back to the chamber where he had left Edith.

He saw that it would be useless to reason with her. He felt that she would return to a sensible view of her foolish freak and be sorry; and with these thoughts he returned to the supper-table.

Edith was waiting, having eaten nothing while he was absent; so they ate in company. Very little was said, however.

Edith was somewhat constrained in her speech, remembering what had occurred; Dick was grim and out of humor, and resolved that Leone should have no further cause for jealousy if he could help it.

After he had partaken of the repast, he left Edith and went off into the men's quarters. At least, Leone should not have cause to say again that he lingered at the side of their fair guest.

Edith amused herself for a while in looking over some books, of which Deadwood Dick had quite a collection.

Leone came in presently, and helped Sam to remove the tea service. Her face was very pale, and her eyes red and swollen. Edith saw it in a moment, and gliding quietly to Leone's side she threw her arms impetuously around her neck.

"You are angry—jealous of me, ain't you, dear Leone?" she said, kissing the white lips of the young wife. "Jealous, and without cause, too. Oh! don't

be, please. You have nothing to fear from me, and I am sure your husband loves you dearly."

Leone put her off almost fiercely.

"Don't!" she said, deprecatingly, and there was a menace in her tone. "I want nothing to do with you. Leave me—go!"

And she stamped her foot imperiously. Frightened at the deadly gleam in her eye, Edith turned away and began looking over the books again. A fear now assailed her that the jealous wife in her frenzy might do her harm—might murder her while she slept.

And the more she thought upon the subject the stronger grew her fears, until she was all trembling and agitation. What should she do? Something, surely, before it should be too late. And but one plan offered itself.

She would go to Deadwood Dick and make known her fears, and he would protect her—he, whom she thought so grand, and handsome, above all men.

With this view in keeping, she left the chamber in which they had dined, and sped through the dark passages and apartments of the grotto. But not taking the main route, it was nearly an hour ere she saw a light to one side, and found herself in the rendezvous chamber, where the whole of the band, unless it be with exception of outposted guards, were gathered.

Edith stopped in the center of the room, terrified at the many masked faces turned toward her.

But Carlos Cambre, Deadwood Dick's gentlemanly lieutenant, came quickly forward to her relief.

"Excuse me, miss; but you are looking for some one, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I was looking for Mr.—"

"Harris—Deadwood Dick?"

"Yes, sir. Where can I find him? I thought he was here."

"He went out, just a moment ago. Pass through that opening yonder, and you will find him on the plateau."

"Thank you!" and Edith hurried away, glad to escape the gaze of so many curious eyes that gleaned through the masks.

She soon emerged onto the wide level plateau. To her great surprise, she perceived that day had already dawned, and the morning sun was lazily rising out of the hazy prairie horizon, far to the east.

From the plateau a person was afforded a fine view of the landscape—the mountains that rolled away until they merged into the prairie, which rose and fell in little hills and hollows like the restless waves on the ocean—the great deep trailing canyon far, far below, and cascades and mountain-torrents that poured their waters into it. All this, as revealed under the mellow morning sunlight, seemed inexpressibly lovely to Edith, who was a great admirer of beautiful scenery.

Deadwood Dick stood at the edge of the plateau, gazing moodily down into the canyon, below, and did not hear Edith's approach until she laid her little white hand upon his arm.

"Mr. Deadwood Dick!"

He started at sound of her voice, and gazed down at her, almost angrily.

"What! you here, Miss Stone? I thought you were enjoying a comfortable sleep."

"I was afraid to go to bed, sir, your wife repulsed me so rudely. She hates me, and I fear will do me injury."

"Pooh! Leone would not harm a mouse. She's a little jealous, that's all. It is the first I had learned that she was of a jealous nature. There, now, go back and you will find sleeping accommodations in the room next to the dining-room. Have no fear that Leone will trouble you, for she will soon get over her spunk."

But these words did not agree with the Prince's real opinion. Something told him that Leone had taken matters more deeply to heart than he had calculated—that she was not so easily conquered of her jealousy.

And had he, as Edith turned back toward the grove, seen a slight figure start into the gloomy entrance out of sight, with pallid cheeks and desperate gleaming eyes, he might have been more assured in his belief.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIGHTING LIKE DEVILS.

YES, some one was coming down the stream, as the two trailers could plainly hear the splash of horses' feet in the water, and, too, but a short distance off.

"We must turn back!" repeated Cherokee Sue, grimly, and throwing herself at full length, she allowed the rapid stream to bear her away.

Having no other mode of escape at hand, Josiah followed her example, although he was loth to get more drenched than he was. And they were not a moment too soon, for Wagner and twelve of the Brotherhood appeared in sight.

"I'm mighty sure I heard voices!" the lieutenant was saying, while he peered around, inquiringly. "Can't be that some meddlesome hunter followed Ivan, can it?"

"Might be, easy enough," replied Blue Bob, with an oath. "Don't see any one, tho'."

"What d'ye think 'bout ther boy's story o' losin' the gurl?" demanded one of the outlaws, as the band followed down the bend of the creek.

"Rackon he's honest enuff, thar," was Wagner's response. "He knows 'twon't do well fer him ter play shenannigan on us, fer he's watched."

Presently the Brothers left the stream, and galloped swiftly away down its banks, through the morning sunlight.

As soon as they were at a safe distance, two dripping figures also crawled ashore, and proceeded to wring the muddy water from their garments.

"Git up thar, Josiah," said Cherokee Sue, grimly. "I allow thar's more action than poetical grace in this 'ere thing, as ther feller sed when he rid the steer ter town. Isay, you Cherry Key, w'at's yer natteral views onter ther matter?"

"Ugh!" replied Sue, grimly—"water nothin'—do ranger good. Drove back once. Try again:—mobbs succeed this time."

"What! ye ain't goin' ter stem that creek ergin, aye ye?"

"Ugh! yes. Sue will go alone, if white hunter am afraid!"

"Git out. Who sed I was afraid?"

"Good! come! We keep on tryin' till we get through! Ugh!"

And the half-breed girl again began to wade carefully up the swift course of the Little Madras, Josiah dogging close at her heels, as if his life depended upon keeping her in view.

"Great ham-bone that dislocated ther whale's jaw w'at masticated old Jonar! hayr cum ther yelpin' red whelps—hayr cum ther ornery famished Arabs o' ther perariel!" yelled Old Avalanche, as the red-skins poured in swarms from out the black night. "Lay fer 'em, boyees!"

But the little band of road-agent hunters needed no urging. They fought like very devils. The crack of revolvers—the groans and shrieks of the dead and dying—the yells of the infuriated savages, and the rallying cries of the rangers—all combined to make night hideous.

Foremost in the fight were Old Avalanche, Scott Sherwood, Jolly Jack, and Mountain Mike, and their blows were dealt with deadly precision.

Gradually but surely the Indians dropped off, and but for their superiority of numbers they must have been signally defeated. But for every painted warrior that fell, there was an instant substitute.

Nor were the red-skins the only sufferers. One by one the rangers went down, their life-blood dyeing the woodland leaves, their groans maddening in the pandemonium of the night.

Still the mad fight waged on.

Scott Sherwood saw how matters were going, and that there was no limit to the savage horde—that there was no hope for life or victory, unless they could make a rush and escape. And how was this to be done?

The answer soon came, and in an unexpected manner. High above the yells of the savages came a startling series of shrieks and screams, followed by loud cries of surprise and consternation, and one side of the red-skin circle suddenly parted; and then, by the light of continuously flashing weapons, was seen the strange, scrawny beast of Old Avalanche, taking a lively part in the affair with his heels and teeth, and driving the frightened enemies before him; and doing capital business was the vicious, ugly goat, of whom the Annihilator took so much pride.

Avalanche saw the two additions, Sherwood saw them, and the blood-blinded rangers saw them, and a great yell of joy welled out upon the night—a yell that bespoke encouragement and victory.

And the little band now seemed inspired with renewed strength, for they made a mad, fierce rush upon the bloodthirsty foe, and fought with clubbed rifles and ringing blades of steel.

"Hurra! hurra!" bellowed Old Avalanche, from the bottom of his lungs, as at the same time he split open an Indian's head with a murderous tomahawk—*that's it, beauties! Let 'em hev, Prudence; haste it to 'em, beautiful Florence! Whoopy! lay fer 'em, b'yees—they're sellin' out cheap, now. Only a hundred or so left, an' we'll close out ther lot at cost. Great Zebulon Zack! yes!*

Suddenly there was the crack of several rifles from beyond the red-skins' ranks, and part of them were obliged to turn and defend themselves from an attack in the rear. This gave the desperate road-agent hunters an advantage, and they followed it up fiercely—some, even fought who were tottering on the verge of the grave, from streaming wounds.

It was a terrible scene, a terrible hour!

"Courage! boys; help is at hand!" rung out words of cheer in the clear, stern voice of Scott Sherwood; "strike true and fast, and victory is soon to be ours."

"Great ham-bone that lodged in ther whale's digestive organs, yes!" shouted Avalanche. "Wipe et to ther dasted ornery scullions. Hey, Prudence, ye durn'd old beast? What d'ye say? Less squeal-in', if ye please, an' more beef-steak. Thet's it! distribute yer heels superfleuous!"

The firing continued on the other side, which gave our friends renewed hope, while it also tended to alarm the savages, full a hundred of whose number were stretched out under foot. Following up the advantage, the rangers were now the attackers, and with desperate resolve they pressed forward. All were more or less wounded, with the exception of Old Avalanche, who had not as yet received a hurt.

Soon the red-skins began to find quarters unpleasantly close, and just as the victorious rangers were contemplating a final stroke, there was a yell from a score of savage throats, and a general scatter.

Victory was awarded the little band, but at what cost!

Of their once formidable band of forty, only twelve remained to tell the tale of the bloody battle. The rest were lying dead among the savages, hardly distinguishable for the blood and smoke that smeared their faces. Twelve were left, counting in Sherwood and Old Avalanche—fourteen, counting the Annihilator's two additions, who had done such praiseworthy service.

And after the savages had fled, they stood staring at each other through the moon, mist and smoke. Sherwood was first to speak!

"We've won, mates!" he said, wiping the perspiration and powder from his face. "Only a few are left, however, and we had best bury our dead, and then bain out. There'll be more of the red demons down on us before another night!"

"You're just talkin', stranger!" exclaimed a

heartly voice, and turning, the rangers beheld four figures coming up.

"Red Kit La Rue, by thunder!" Sherwood exclaimed, springing forward and grasping the hand of a man of giant proportions.

"Yes, Red Kit, sure enough, boyee. But what in the name o' John Rogers, ever brought you up here, Sherwood?"

"We came with Captain Norris, Kit, in search of Deadwood Dick."

"You did? Wal, may I ever be mother-in-lawed. That's the identical object that fetched me up hayr—this road-agent cuss."

"You're fishin' after the reward, then?"

"Nary. I'm fishin' after my gal, Alice. When Deadwood Dick varnoosed, my gal also disappeared. So, natterally, I concluded thet ther dasted galoot kidnapped her, an' if I find thet he did, red darn his plecter, I'll manufacture him inter coyote food."

"Who have you got with ye, thar?"

"Well, they're ruther a split up lot. One's a fellow called Tornado Tom; another is a gentleman called Darrel, an' t'other's a queer sorter chap who calls hisself Tom Jefferson Jagers; dunno what his profession is. Picked him up back here a ways—got the other two at Bear Trail."

"Great ham-bone that floored Jonah!" cried Avalanche, springing forward. "Reckon aforesaid Jagers aire one o' my party, as got massykerd. Give us yer paw. How d'ye git resserected? War deader'n a door-sill, last I see'd o' ye."

Jagers laughed quietly.

"It seems you and I both played dead, old man," replied the long, gaunt individual, with light hair and cadaverous face, whom the Annihilator had singled out. "Also another of the lot—Colonel Grafton Stone."

Here an exclamation of surprise escaped the foreign-looking gentleman Red Kit had called Darrel, but whose real name he afterward affirmed to be Stone.

For traveling use he assumed the name of Darrel as a disguise.

"Stone—Colonel Grafton Stone, did you say?" he repeated, excitedly.

"That is what I said," repeated Jagers, indifferently, though all the while he was sharply scrutinizing the other with his little ferret eyes.

"And was this Stone accompanied by his wife and one whom he calls his daughter, sir?"

"He was. His wife was killed, and the young lady carried off by a young robber chief, whom I overheard his companions call Wild Ivan."

The man Darrel started violently.

"Ivan, you say—Wild Ivan?"

"Yes, sir."

"By Heaven, this makes two valuable discoveries, Elkton," Darrel said, turning to the young frontiersman, whom Red Kit had designated as Tornado Tom. "We are in possession of important clues, at least, and have ground to work on—more than we have had, previously."

"Right, Mr. Darrel. The difficult part of the undertaking is gradually dissolving, and if the girl is not dead, I'm bound to find her. Poor Edith!"

"I am led to believe that this Grafton Stone is a grave offender, from your conversation!" remarked Jagers, in an inquisitive way.

"So he is. He is the abductor of my child, and the forger of my name."

"Indeed! then he is more of a criminal than I expected, though I had not formed a very favorable idea of him. Should think you would have advertised him."

"So I did. I advertised him in the East, but have neglected to do so out here. I will pay that man who will cause his arrest, however, five hundred dollars, and as much more for the recovery of my lost child."

"You will? Very well, I will remember your case, sir."

In the mean time Red Kit and the rangers were en-

gaged sorting out those of the valiant little band who had fallen in the battle, from among the dead savages. A huge grave was hollowed out, and therein the poor fellows were laid, handsome Captain Norris being the last to be consigned to the humble tomb.

Jolly Jack then made a pathetic and effective prayer, after which the grave was filled in, covering forever from sight of man those whose lives had been full of deeds of valor—whose death would bring sadness to many a home and fireside.

Sherwood then turned to those gathered around him.

"Mates!" he said, hoarsely, "we have done our last work for our loved friends. There is no more we could do if we were to stay. Therefore, I propose that we get out of this."

"And whither will ye go?" asked Red Kit.

"Into the Hills. Our work lies there. We should have been there this morning, only that we were awaiting the return of Rivers, our spy."

"Well, where you go, goes Red Kit," replied the giant, "for ef Mr. Deadwood Dick's got my gal, he's the very man I am purrty anxious to see."

"So be it, then. All who intend going into the Hills, be kind enough to say so. Jolly Jack, you go and see if the horses have been disturbed."

Jack hastened to obey.

Old Avalanche had caught and mounted Prudence Cordella, on whom and the goat he was lavishing many voluble praises for their valuable assistance.

"Great Moses in ther bullrushes, Prudence! I'm jest proud o' yer conduct—an' o' yourn, too, Florence, dear! Why, it war sublimely beautiful ter see ye mow away ther red scullions, an' make yer marks as fit representatives o' ther great Annihilation!"

Jolly Jack soon came running back, somewhat excitedly.

"They're gone—every durned beast!" he cried, with an oath.

"'Bout as I expected," said Sherwood. "We shall have to walk to the Hills."

There was no help for it, and without delay, the whole party set forth. But as soon as they were well out of the grove, it was discovered that the Annihilator had deviated from the main course, and was speeding away to the southwest, on the back of his war-horse, Prudence.

Strange to say, Florence Night-in-the-gale had still remained with the command, which was sufficient argument to convince one and all that they had not seen the last of the eccentric old fellow.

What were his plans or intentions, no one could guess.

After a day's steady tramp, the little band reached the lower foot-slopes of the Black Hills range, where Tom Jefferson Jagers took leave of them, followed by Mr. Darrel and Tornado Tom.

In a gorge, where loneliness and gloom were noticeable characteristics, Sherwood ordered the camp pitched, and it was while the men were busy in preparations, that something occurred of a startling nature.

CHAPTER IX.

MATTERS AT THE GROTTO—JAGGERS!

AFTER Edith had gone back into the cavern, Deadwood Dick paced to and fro across the plateau, a dark frown upon his brow, a nervousness in his tread that bespoke great mental agitation.

"Curse the hour that ever induced me to bring the girl here!" he muttered, a trifle fiercely. "It looks like the total wrecking of my happiness. I cannot have her here, where she will constantly be a thorn in Leone's path. What am I to do, then?"

It was a knotty problem, but one thing was positive, and that was, that the fair girl must be somehow removed from the Castle.

For full an hour Dick patrolled the plateau, then he returned to the grotto, grim and moody. He met Leone in one of the passages, talking with Car-

los Cambre, but passed on without deigning to notice her. She was looking pale and haggard. In his own luxuriously-furnished chamber he was undisturbed; yet several times, while in a drowsy state, he was conscious of some one bending over him—conscious that a pair of warm lips were pressed to his in a passionate caress; but when a few minutes later he would rouse up and look around, the owner of those lips would be gone.

But it gave him unbounded satisfaction that she still loved—his red-haired, heroic little Leone—that she had not allowed her mad jealousy to uproot the love in her heart; and when he finally left his couch, it was with a strong hope that the barrier between them had been broken—that the cloud of doubt no longer obscured the horizon of their life.

In the adjoining room he found Edith engaged in reading from his books.

She looked up with a winning smile as he entered, while a crimson flush went rioting over her pretty face.

"I am looking at the picture-books to pass away time," she said, making room on the rude settee beside her. "It is terribly lonesome here without any one to talk to. Won't you sit down?"

"No, I think not, Miss Stone. My wife is jealous, you know, which ought to be explanation enough."

"Oh! yes, I had forgotten. But surely there can be no harm in your speaking to me?"

"Not as we look at it, Miss Stone; but she might see volubility of meaning in one single word. Jealous eyes are not noted for correct interpretation, you know."

"I don't know," replied Edith, with a little laugh, "for I was never jealous, unless—"

She looked quickly down at her book and began to finger the leaves nervously, while Deadwood Dick passed on, seeing her painful confusion.

He saw how it was, with his quick intuition. She would have said, had she completed the broken sentence:

"Unless it is of your wife—Leone!"

And this was the truth of the matter.

Edith *was* secretly in love with the dashing, gallant Prince of the Road.

Dick could not believe it had gone quite so far as this; yet, what was he to understand by her blushes, her hesitation, and last of all, this uncompleted "unless"?

It looked as if he had unwittingly entangled himself in a web of intricate weaving, from which there was no visible means of egress.

Three days passed, and it was the morning of Edith's fourth at the Castle.

In the last two days she had only caught an occasional glimpse of Deadwood Dick as he flitted in and out of the grotto.

Leone came at meal-time and ordered the arrangement of the repast, and then departed, scarcely deigning her farthest glance. But on this fourth morning she came in, a set look in her eyes; her lips expressed a firm resolve.

"Your name is Edith Stone, is it not?"

"Yes, my name," Edith replied, wondering what was to come next.

"Well, then, Edith Stone, know that your coming here has been the means of forever parting me from my husband. He is a base deceiver, and you are the one who has won him away; so for your reward take this!"

And springing fiercely upon poor Edith, the infuriated wife drove a gartering knife at the unsuspecting girl's bosom. But before it touched the flesh, a hand wrenched it to one side—and turning, Leone beheld a tall, lank stranger by her side—a man in whose gray eyes gleamed a light that made her tremble.

And that man we have met before, in the name of *Thomas Jefferson Juggers*!"

At this same moment, while Deadwood Dick was

pacing the plateau outside the grotto, he beheld Cambre, his lieutenant, approaching with a dozen of the band at his heels.

Surprised, as he had issued no orders for their departure from the grotto, the young chief stopped in the center of the plateau and waited for them to come up, his brow darkening.

"How is this, lieutenant; where bound?" he demanded, seeing that the outlaws were armed. "Who gave you orders to leave the Castle?"

"No one, captain," replied Cambre, flushing uneasily beneath the stern gaze of the Prince of the Road. "It is not our intention to leave the stronghold, but it becomes our painful duty to put you under arrest!"

Deadwood Dick leaped back with an oath.

"What! put me under arrest? Are you crazy, man?"

"No, captain. I never was more sane than now. It is by Madam Leone's orders, and they are imperative."

"Who commands here, I'd like to know—Leone or Deadwood Dick?"

"Leone, at present, captain. You are our prisoner, and I hope you will not put us to unnecessary trouble. Probably a few days will fix things."

"No! It will never fix things!" Deadwood Dick cried, his eyes blazing. "I am commander here, yet, I'll have you know. Back to your places, every mother's son of you! The first one that moves to lay a hand on me is a dead man!"

And out came the young chief's revolvers, in a twinkling, and to a level, at full cock.

"Go!" he commanded, sternly, his voice hoarse with passion, "or your blood be on your own heads!"

"No, captain, we will *never* go!" replied Cambre, "until you go with us. At him, boys! take him alive!"

The road-agents sprang determinedly forward, and threw themselves upon their chief—he fired three shots, each of which meant a death; then they overpowered him, by force of numbers, and bore him to the rocky floor, where he was securely bound, hand and foot.

"Curse you, you have dug your grave, to-day, lieutenant," came from Dick's lips, as he realized that he was indeed a prisoner among his own men. "One traitor lieutenant paid the penalty of death in Deadwood; the second shall as surely follow. Remember!"

"I will not forget it, captain. I am sorry, and would not have you call me a traitor, for no truer man to the band than I will you find. But you have wronged her, whom you should love better than life, and we as men could not refuse to obey her orders!"

Dick made no reply, and without further ado he was lifted and borne into the grotto. Along through damp rocky passages he was carried, seemingly into the very heart of the mountain.

Presently a cell was reached, which man's ingenuity and workmanship had converted into a dungeon.

Inside this rock and iron-bound prison the young chief was carried, and laid upon a bundle of furs, after which he was disarmed, and his bonds removed, a collar to which was linked a stout chain that communicated with a ring in the wall, being placed about his left ankle, as a substitute.

Then the road-agents, along with Cambre, retired from the cell, locking the door after them.

Thus was Deadwood Dick made a helpless prisoner, at the mercy of his young wife, whom he had not seen for the last two days.

A torch had been left burning in a crevice of the wall, and he could see that his cell had been prepared for him.

There were furs for him to lie on, and furs upon the rocky floor. Also, a few chairs and a rude stand relieved the place of some of its cheerlessness.

The cell was one of the remotest in the grotto, and out of the way of all discovery, in a dark by-way;

therefore there was no hope of being liberated by any one who might be opposed to his imprisonment, —Edith, for instance.

And it was with a heavy heart, and a bitter feeling toward Leone, that Deadwood Dick threw himself upon his couch, and anxiously waited for something to occur that would relieve the monotony of his unpleasant situation.

It was indeed the ferret-eyed Thomas Jefferson Jagers who had saved Edith's life by warning off the descending blow of Leone, as in her jealous fury she would have committed a murder.

She started back with a cry of alarm as she perceived that it was a stranger who had interfered.

"Who are you?" she gasped, growing faint and dizzy. "What do you want?"

"I want a good deal, young woman!" Jagers replied coolly. "As to who I am, I'm called Thomas Jefferson Jagers, the Sleuth-hound of Cincinnati!"

"You are a detective, then?" Leone almost screamed.

"Exactly, ma'am; but you needn't yell loud enough to inform them road-agents out on the plateau. I am an officer of the U. S. Secret Service, if you wish to know so bad, sent here to obtain a reward offered for the capture of Deadwood Dick."

A smile passed over Leone's features, for she doubted not that even then the prince of the road was incarcerated in his lonely cell.

"You are bold to come here," she said, trying to escape the grasp which he had placed upon her arm. "Release me, sir, or I will scream for assistance!"

"Not yet, my dear; and if you scream it will be your last vocal demonstration. Remember! for I mean all I say. Why were you attempting to knife this young lady just now?"

"Because I *hate* her!" replied Leone, in a fierce tone. "She is an adventuress, who has come here and—and stole away the love of my husband. I'll kill her!"

"Not just at present. The girl is under my charge, and so are you. Now I want you to inform me where I can lay my hands on this gay and festive road-agent husband of yours—Mr. Deadwood Dick?"

"I'll do nothing of the kind! Find him if you can; I'll not tell you."

"Perhaps you can, miss," Jagers said, turning to Edith.

"I don't know," replied she, falteringly. Had she known of Dick's immediate whereabouts, she would have hesitated at giving the information.

"Queer that neither of you have any idea what has become of the rascal," Jagers growled with a sneer. "But I'll trap him, never fear. And once I have safely bagged him, I'll call upon Scott Sherwood and his band to help me take the remainder of the gang. Until then you are both my prisoners."

"Oh, no!" Leone replied mockingly. "Your fine game won't work, for you can't get us away without going out onto the plateau."

"Hang the plateau. Maybe you have not explored the pretty sufficiently well to know that there is another mode of egress. Come along, now, and if you give even one squeak, it will be your death warrant. Young lady, you are the Edith Stone whom Wild Ivan attempted to carry off from the massacred train, are you not?"

"Oh, yes, sir. And I am so glad you have come," replied Edith. "Will you take me back to Cleveland, sir?"

"Still better, Miss Stone, I will take you to your father, who with a scout named Tom Elkton, or Tornado Tom, is in these mountains, somewhere, in search of you. But, come, let's get out of this before these road-agent devils discover us. Come, young woman."

And still retaining a grasp upon Leone's arm, the

secret service man pushed along out of the room into a dark passage which Edith, who followed close behind, had never penetrated before.

Jagers led on through a series of tortuous, narrow passages, high of ceiling, but exceeding rough under foot.

Finally he stopped before a niche in the wall, pushed Edith in first, and then following with his prisoner. After several hundred yards' winding travel, they suddenly emerged onto the wooded mountain-side, down which led a path evidently worn by bears in their descent for water. Down this the detective hurried his prizes, as if anxious to quit the neighborhood in a hurry.

After he had disappeared, a man rolled out of a clump of bushes close to the grotto-entrance, and stood gazing around him. And that man was none other than the redoubtable Old Avalanche!

CHAPTER X.

THE BOY FIEND AND ALICE—AVALANCHE EXPLORES.

We will return to that date when we saw Wild Ivan passing up the water-course of the Little Madras, on his way to the stronghold of the Brotherhood, and will follow him thither.

After plunging his horse into the rapid stream at the junction where the shores were formed of mountain walls, he stemmed the waters for perhaps a mile, along a lonely gorge, the stream gradually growing deeper and swifter, until a rapids was reached in a part where the channel was wide, steep and filled with huge rocks, against which the mad waves made a din of weird music, and dashed themselves into foaming caps.

The rapids were about a half-mile in length, and after passing safely through them, the young outlaw soon arrived upon the shore on which was situated the camp of the Brotherhood.

Several of the band were lounging lazily around a camp-fire as Wild Ivan rode up, while a dozen or more were in the saddle, ready for departure.

"Where away, lieutenant?" the Boy Fiend asked, as he perceived that Wagner and Blue Bob were among the rest. "What's afoot, now?"

"A band o' road-agent hunters ar' reported among ther foothills, capt'n, an' I thought it best to look after them," replied Wagner. "But where's ther gal ye took from the train?"

Wild Ivan flushed angrily at being thus questioned, but told his story in a light that created belief in the minds of his listeners. Without any comment, Wagner set out from the camp on his mission, followed by his chosen Brothers.

Later, they forced Josiah Hogg and Cherokee Sue from the channel, as we have previously shown.

Wild Ivan dismounted from his horse as soon as they had gone, and entered a cave among the crags, where some half a dozen of the band were playing cards, while others, still, were stretched upon the floor on their blankets, fast asleep.

"Hey, Bostwick, where are you?" he cried, authoritatively; and in answer to his call, a man with long gray beard, and sharp, piercing eyes, appeared. "Here, you old rascal, redress this wound upon my right elbow, for it has been cared for only once since yester eve. Be careful, and cause me no pain, or I'll break your thick skull."

"Yes, chief," the man replied, with apparent humbleness, and cutting away a portion of the young outlaw's sleeve, he dressed the shattered arm, with a skill few could equal.

Once the troublesome limb was bandaged and supported in a sling, the Boy Fiend was himself again, and rising, he glared around him, observing each man sharply.

But none of the Brothers paid him the least attention.

"They have luckily not set much in store concerning Edith," he muttered. "So much the better, for I anticipated a devilish row. But all seems quiet. And, now, let me take a look at this girl whom Bill Blood brought here from Deadwood—"

Red Kit's girl, they call her. Where is she, Bostwick—the girl?"

"In thar, captain," the surgeon replied, pointing to an inner cave that opened off from the first one.

Without waiting for ceremony, the outlawed youth strode into the chamber, and glanced around him.

Upon a couch of skins in one corner Alice La Rue was half-reclining, but she sprung to her feet the moment she beheld her enemy, for she knew that Wild Ivan was her enemy even when he had been initiated to chieftancy the night of Bill Blood's death.

A gloriously fair, beautiful girl was she, with a soft, creamy complexion and long, waving hair like golden sunshine, and eyes partaking wondrously of the blue depths of heaven, while in her face sweetness of temper and the sunny nature of innocent girlhood were expressed, and yet those calm, blue eyes had power to transform to a deadly glitter, when her anger was aroused.

She sprung to her feet now, her fair face flushed, her lips compressed, her eyes gleaming darkly.

"Ha! is this the fair creature who holds the secret of Red Kit's treasure?" said Wild Ivan, mockingly, as he advanced. "By my soul, you *are* pretty!"

"And you are ugly and repulsive!" flashed Alice, scornfully. "Why do you come here to torture me, you young villain?"

"Torture you? Is my presence then such a source of excruciating agony? *Once* you didn't think so!"

At this the girl turned white.

"You need not throw out your hints, you wretch!" she replied, trembling as she spoke. "I know you full well, even though you wear that mask."

"Oh! you know me, do you?" the Boy Fiend retorted, a little surprised. "Well, so much the better. You can better judge what mercy to expect."

"I expect *no* mercy from you, cruel brute that you are. I am only a helpless girl and powerless to defend myself, but there is One in Heaven—an All-wise Ruler, who will avenge the wrongs inflicted upon the weak and innocent!"

"Possible? We'll, maybe you're level, there, my beauty; but as long as I'm doomed for the fryin'-pan of Satan, anyhow, what use is there of my lettin' up, now? A few more tough crimes added to my tablets, won't make the sulphur smoke any denser, nor the flames tickle any the harder!"

Alice shuddered.

"You are a demon, I believe!" she cried, marveling at the baseness of one so young in years.

"Yes—a fiend, they call me," was the laughing response. "Maybe I deserve the title of the Boy Fiend, for I've been steeped in crime since I ran away from the Cadet school. That was before I came to the Black Hills, and met and fell hopelessly in love with you."

"Ugh! the thoughts of being loved by such as you are disgusting!" cried Alice, putting up her hands, deprecatingly.

"Yes, perhaps. But I love thee still, my lily of the forest, and now that the oppor—"

He did not finish the sentence, but stepped forward a pace, his evil eyes gleaming triumphantly.

"Back! monster—touch me not!" cried Red Kit's daughter, commandingly, and her hand dropped among the folds of her dress. "Keep off, or it will be the worse for you."

"Oh! you cannot frighten me by pretense of drawing a pistol, my heroic maid!" sneered Wild Ivan, sarcastically. "Such ruses won't work."

And the next instant he had leaped quickly forward and caught her around the waist with his uninjured left arm, while with his whole force he endeavored to bear her back against the couch of furs.

But nerved to desperation, the girl struggled bravely; they weaved back and forward, each working for the mastery. Thus the struggle continued for perhaps five minutes; then suddenly there was a sharp ringing report of a pistol, and the Boy Fiend relaxed his hold and fell prostrate upon the floor.

The next instant Alice bounded across the floor

and out into the quarters occupied by the Brothers, thence into the open air.

With yells of astonishment, the outlaws gave chase, yelling for her to stop.

She reached the outside and glanced quickly around her, undecided how to act. Four or five fellows, who had been lounging around the camp-fire, saw her, and leaping to their feet, were hurriedly approaching.

Every avenue of escape seemed cut off, except one. The Little Madrasa, with its rushing waters, lay at her feet, and upon the shore was beached a canoe.

With a cry of defiance the heroic girl bounded forward, pushing the boat out into the stream and springing in, taking care to throw herself on her face in the bottom.

The strong current caught the frail bark as in a mighty grasp and bore it away with alarming velocity.

A swarm of ruffians, howling like demons incarnate, poured out onto the banks, the Boy Fiend among the foremost, for he had only been momentarily stunned by a bullet-wound, close upon his temple.

"Catch her! stop the boat!" he yelled, swearing furiously. "A hundred dollars for that young wench's head!"

Spurred to exertion by this offer, three of the Brotherhood sprung upon horses and plunged them into the stream in pursuit, while others sent bullets after the flying craft.

But all in vain.

Very naturally, the water moved faster than was within the power of the horses, and the canoe kept pace with the water, so that pursuit was utterly useless, seeing which, the ruffians returned to camp.

Wild Ivan was in a terrible passion, and acted like a madman. Finally, he mounted his own beast and turning into the stream, set off down the gorge.

Twice within the last twenty-four hours he had lost a prize, and this last was the worst blow of all, for it would depreciate him in the eyes of the Brotherhood, with whom he desired to keep on amiable terms, as their chief, for a while at least.

In the mean time, where was Alice?

As soon as she could no longer hear sounds of pursuit she sat up in the canoe, and seizing a paddle, managed to keep it near the center of the turbulent stream, which bore it on with great rapidity.

On—on the bark sped, with its fair burden; then, on rounding a bend, she beheld to her horror the foaming, roaring rapids.

She had not thought of them before, but now the peril of her situation dawned upon her in an instant. Alice was no coward, and with a firm hand on the paddle, and standing erect in the little craft, she steered her way with the skill of an experienced raftsmen, dextrously avoiding covered rocks that were more to be feared than those protruding out of water.

She was midway in the roaring rapids, and peering ahead for rocks, when she suddenly discovered *two human heads and faces upon the uneven surface of the water*—heads from which the eyes were protruding strangely.

And a shudder of terror crept over her when she perceived that *they were coming toward her—up the stream!*

"Great ham-bone thet kerflummixed old Joner!" exclaimed the Annihilator, as he gazed down the hill in the direction in which detective Jagers had gone with his two charges. "Hayr ar' sumthin' ter smell arter—sumthin' ter chew yer cud on! Mister Thomas Jefferson Jagers a-totin' of two females out frum a hoel in the mountain. An' w'ars that hoel lead to, in the name of Zip Coon? Ar' this mountain a cattycomb, or sich, or what?"

The old man approached the fissure-like passage, and peered ahead. All was dark and silent within as the grave.

"Quare kind of a place. Lucks as ef thar might speerits abble in thar—speerits clothed in flesh. At tennyrate, long-legged Jaggers cum out o' thar, an' that looks as if he war reskyin' them gals. Old Avalanche, ye devastatin' old disease o' ther peraries—ye destructive Injun eppydemick, shall ye run yer smellin' horn inter thet crypt? Shall ye whistle like a bullstifferous boreal breeze o' extarmination inter thet burrer o' hog-gobblins an' decayed speerits?"

Evidently such was his final conclusion, for he plunged stealthily forward into the dense gloom that filled the narrow passageway.

"Zebulum Zachariah an' all the he-rines o' modern Grease! this ar' wuss than livin' in ther sunshine o' an Egyptian's countenance!" growled the scout, as he felt his way along, occasionally falling prostrate over some unseen rock—"blacker in a Georgia niggero in a total eclipse o' the sun. Not quite so bad as I encountered up in Idaho, onc't—no! not quite. Et war actooally so consarned thick wi' blackness that my old mare Prudence got stuck, an' thar we sot as immover'ble as a balky mule, until ther sun riz an' penetrated ter us, an' thawed erway ther night. An' ther black reflections o' thet night didn't wash off our countenances fer a week—fact, by gracious!"

And the old man chuckled softly to himself as if he hugely enjoyed the thoughts of such a situation.

For some time he worked his way along, cautiously, but at last he came to a standstill. Footsteps were approaching, from within the mountain, and coming nearer each moment.

The passage was very narrow at this point—two persons could not pass without touching each other.

The Annihilator perceived this and with a grim chuckle drew his knife, and awaited the enemy's coming.

One or the other must die.

Nearer came the man; he was growling some unintelligible words to himself, of whose import Avalanche was ignorant. At last they were but a pace apart; then the veteran guide leaped forward and bore the astonished road-agent to the ground. There was a short struggle, then a hollow groan, and springing nimbly to his feet, the Annihilator continued his journey.

He, now, however, exercised more caution, and his footfalls were soft and stealthy as a cat's.

Leaving the narrow passage soon after his encounter with the road-agent, he sped along through a large chamber, where the echo of his tread was alarmingly loud. But he kept on, passing from one chamber into another; seemingly there was no limit to this inner-mountain honeycomb.

The darkness was intense, but his eyes became so used to it that he could faintly distinguish objects a few feet before his face.

Suddenly he made a discovery as he entered a narrow corridor. Far ahead shone like a star a jet of light. It was at the end of the passage, evidently, and redoubling his stealth, the old man hurried on until at last he was within a few rods of it. Then he was able to determine whence it came.

CHAPTER XI.

OUT OF BONDAGE—MERMAIDS.

"Great ham-bone thet wrecked ther constitution ov old Joner!" came involuntarily from the Annihilator's lips.

Just in front of him was a natural dungeon in the rocks, whose entrance was grated by a door of stout iron bars.

The light emanated from a torch within this cell, which, thrust into a crevice of the wall, showered its bright light down upon a figure stretched upon a couch of skins—none other than the imprisoned Prince of the Road—Deadwood Dick.

And Old Avalanche recognized him at once, though several months had elapsed since he had last seen him, while making a descent upon a Deadwood saloon.

"Great Zebulum Zachariah! et's ther dasted

young road-agent chief, sure's bald beads ar' pe-coolier ter old men!" the old adventurer muttered, leaning upon his rifle, and gazing meditatively toward the cell. "Deadwood Dick, sure's thar's feedin' in'er mule's hind feet. Wonder what in ther world the young cuss is a-join' in thar, all penned up like a caged squirrel? He's got a bracelet onter one o' his lower wristlets, tew. Lucks powerfully as if he war a prisoner. Wonder ef et would do this devastatin' disease any good ter interview his lordliness. S'pect 'twouldn't be any harm, unless he raised a boreal breeze!"

It was several moments before he could decide whether it was best to apprise the young chief of his presence or not.

Certain it was that Deadwood Dick was imprisoned, and if not by his own band, whose then?—if this was not his stronghold, whose was it? The den of the Brotherhood of Death? No! the old man was sure that their haunts were located a few miles further east by north, as the crow flies; this then must be Deadwood Dick's own stronghold, or else he was a captive in the power of some other mountain gang of outlaws—for the northern wilderness was thickly infested with roving bands.

The old guide thought over matters in his grim, quiet fashion; then stepping forward, he paused before the iron grate, taking care to let his hands rest near his pistol belt.

"Hello! young chap. Great ham-bone that clogged up old Joner's windpipe! what aire ye doin' in thar? One'd a'most think ye was a prisoner!"

Deadwood Dick leaped quickly to his feet, arousing from a drowse, into which he had fallen. His first impression was that Leone had come to taunt him, and he steeled his heart to meet her calmly; but a second glance at the rough, grizzled face outside the grating, convinced him of his error.

"Who are you?" he demanded, coming to the limits of his chain. "How did you come here? What do you want?"

"One questyun at er time, Mr. Dickey o' Deadwood, an' ye shall be answered, ef et takes till Grant puts our next presidency. In ther fust place I am the general masheenry o' that great achievement notable as Old Avalanche, ther Great Injun Annihilator—ther awe-inspirin' hailstorm o' extarmination—ther dread infectious devastation ephydemick o' ther peraries. Probably read o' me in ther primer an' hymn books, ain't ye? I've two other cog-wheels o' ther Annihilation, who aire not presently in gear wi' ther main construction, namely—my old mare, Prudence Cordellar, and my rambunctious genus capery dorg, Florence Night-in-a-gale.

"Secondly, I kim inter this consarned cattycorn thru a dasted nasty hoel in ther rocks, thet Tommie Jeff Jaggers went out o'. Thirdly, am in heer on a devastatin' experdishun, wi' a v'ew ter extarminatin' whatusomever I lay claws on—most uv all, s'archin' fer a gal named Alice La Rue, an' another 'n' named Edith Stone!"

"Are you indeed Old Avalanche, the great scout?" cried Deadwood Dick, in surprise. "I have often heard of you."

"Ye have, eh? Wal, I presume so, and y'u'r reputation hain't slouchy, my gay young cockolorum. But, what aire ye doin' thar—rustycakin' for yer health, or studyin' astronomy?"

"I am a prisoner, old man—in my own stronghold. The men whom I deemed true as steel, have turned against me, and you see me locked up here like a common thief!" replied Dick, bitterly, his handsome face darkening.

"Phew!" Old Avalanche whistled, in surprise. "A prisoner, hey? I allus sed thar war'n't much 'onor amung thieves, an' as thar aire allus an illustration ter a case, luk at ther time w'en I an' Jim Sykes war pannin' gold out over at Spearfish last summer. Jim war a fust class pilgrim all 'cept his fingers. He would let 'em becum magnetic—thet aire, w'en they layed onter a thing they stuck thar, ef ye war'n't cluss by ter help him disentangle 'em,

An' one day he got 'em froze fast ter my rifle, a white shirt, an' fifteen ounces o' pure ariferous, an' hevin' ter suddenly depart fer Deadwood, he naterally war compelled ter take 'em along. Hain't seen him since."

Deadwood Dick laughed heartily at the old veteran's story. He enjoyed hearing such yarns, and the companionship of just such odd characters as this notorious Annihilator.

"That was bad, old gent. But are you not risking a good deal in coming here? If any of my band should discover you, you'd get bounced away in double quick time."

"Yas, no doubt; but this 'ere devastatin' eppydemic ain't on ther sick list yet. S'pose likely you'd not be averse to leavin' that cell, eh? 'Pears ter me ye'd sagaciate better out inter open air, whar a boreal breeze c'u'd git at ye an' purify yer gizzard."

"It would be agreeable, it's a fact," replied Dick, brightening a little. "But it is useless to think of getting out, when there are two locks between me and liberty."

Old Avalanche did not reply. He was busily engaged in scrutinizing the padlock, which, with a stout-linked chain, fastened the gate. After a momentary survey, he produced a piece of wire from a buckskin pouch at his back, and bent it in the shape of a key of the skeleton pattern. It failed to work on the first trial, and he was rebending it, when the sounds of footsteps came echoing through the cavern.

"Quick! get out of sight!" whispered Dick shrilly, and obeying the injunction Avalanche glided back into the blackness of the corridor through which he had come.

And not a bit too soon, for in another moment Carlos Cambre appeared, bearing a steaming repast of roast buffalo hump upon a server, and a bowl of fragrant coffee, which tickled the nostrils of the hiding Annihilator tantalizingly.

Unlocking the door, the lieutenant entered the cell and deposited the tray upon the table, and then turned to Deadwood Dick, who had resumed his reclining position upon the couch.

"There, captain, is your meal. We do not mean to starve you, even though we hold you in durance," Cambre said pleasantly.

"You might as well withhold the grub and done with it!" was the cold reply. "I am a prisoner, and bread and water will do."

"I will speak to my lady, and mayhap she can accommodate you!" sneered the other, as he backed out of the cell. "We are not at all particular what ye eat."

Then he would have locked the door, had not he received a stunning whack beside the left ear that stretched him prostrate and insensible upon the hard, rocky floor.

"More ether got bull dozed!" exclaimed Avalanche, rubbing his fist dolefully. "That feller's head war harder'n any nigger's c'u'd ever be, by gracious! Nigh erbout dislocated a knuckle fer me; fact! An' now, Dick, boy, ef ye want escape an' accompny ther great extermination breeze, why this aint yer chance."

"Yes. Cambre has the key to my manacles in his hand there, with a dozen others. Give it to me and I will free myself," replied Deadwood Dick, now once more himself that liberty was at hand. "Then we will quit this accursed place forever."

"Ye won't rejoin yer band, then?" queried Avalanche, as he took possession of the keys and freed Dick's limb of the chain and band.

"No! Nevermore shall these men call me Deadwood Dick, their chief. Once, old man, I had a band of as daring, faithful spirits as ever rode a horse, but they were gradually killed off until the last one was gone. I added to my force, at each loss, such men as I thought would serve me true; but it's an old Western saying, credited to Jack Barronnett, 'that there's no settin' hen's nest w/out a bad egg in it,' and it has come true in my case. But I forgot!

There is one whom we must not leave behind us—one who claims my protection."

"Yer red-headed wife, hey?"

"No! *she* has a claim upon me no longer, Avalanche. It was by her orders that I was imprisoned in this dungeon, and it was the last act of her love for me. Hereafter our lives must be changed—our paths must diverge. In going with you from this grotto, I leave all behind for her use. Would to God I could bury the past within these walls, too. But that cannot be. Come! we will go for Miss Stone, and then leave the cavern by the way you came."

"Great ham-bone that corrupted Jone! Ther gal ain't hayr, boy, ef et's her ye mean;" and then, in a few words as possible, the Annihilator related what is already known to the reader—how he had seen Jagers, with Edith and another female, with red hair, descend the mountain side.

It was startling intelligence for the road-agent chief, for, although he had firmly resolved to forever separate himself from Leone, he did not wish any harm to befall her.

"And this Jagers—who is he?" he demanded, anxiously.

"Zebulom Z. I hain't ther infernal-est idear, boyee, unless he's a detective, which he looks like. I kinder smelt a rat when he war w/ our train."

After a little more conversation, Deadwood Dick decided to go in search of a rifle, only lacking this, by having appropriated Cambre's belt weapons.

He was not gone long, soon returning with his own complete outfit, which he had fortunately discovered in his own chamber.

Then, with Old Avalanche, he set out on his departure from the grotto.

On the way, the Annihilator, in his quaint style, related all of importance concerning the massacre of the emigrant-train, and the battle of the road-agent hunters with the Indians, dwelling particularly upon the astonishing prowess of old Prudence Cordelia and Florence Night-in-a-gale.

Finally, they emerged from the grotto onto the mountain-side, much to Deadwood Dick's surprise, for he had never known of the existence of such an outlet.

After a short consultation, in which it was decided to hunt up Jagers and his two companions, Old Avalanche struck into the bear-path trail, that ran obliquely down the mountain-side, and trotted briskly along, Deadwood Dick following at a safe distance behind, for he did not wish to encounter Leone.

It was a discovery of a startling nature that Alice La Rue made, and for the moment she could not credit the perfectness of her vision; but it did not take her long to assure herself that they were really human heads and faces, there upon the misty surface of the rapids, and live heads and faces, too.

For as her canoe glided closer, a voice—unmistakably that of a man—sung out, lustily:

"Hello! whar ye goin', gal? Seen anythin' o' a couple o' miser'ble jackasses as were fule enuff ter stem this yere stream? Hold up! don't git skeert. We're human, w'at's above water. This critter aside me aint Susan B. Anthony, a Cherokee gal, an' I'm Josiah William Ross Wallace Hogg—ther great poet o' ther Powder river range; Hogg in all cases bein' spelt w/ two g's!"

Alice screamed, and endeavored to guide her canoe to one side, in order to avoid coming in contact with the two frightful bodiless objects, but they anticipated her, and also changed their course to intercept her.

"Ye needen't be erfraid," reiterated Josiah, blowing and spluttering like a porpoise, while Sue's eyes gleamed like coals of fire. "We ain't no elefants, nor merm'ids, nor nuthin' o' ther kind. We're jest two ordinary mortals, as ar' tryin' ter penetrate Wild Ivan's camp. Sue, hayr, hes got a hornit ter buzz in ther young feller's ear. As Moar sed:

"She's got er grudge ag'in' him,
Ter ther wall she'll firmly pin him,
An' wi' skulpin'-knife she'll skin him,
Ther dirty beast he is!"

And the hunter gave a huge laugh, in which Sue joined, much to Alice's horror, for they appeared so strange and grotesque that she could not well believe them human.

With almost superhuman strength she forced the canoe to one side, hoping against hope that she could get past them.

"Keep off! keep off!" she screamed, and raising her paddle she swung it aloft, and brought it down fiercely upon the four hands that would have grasped hold the edge of the canoe.

There was a howl of pain, and the next moment she was safely out of reach of the two water-figures, and speeding swiftly along through the misty, spraying rapids.

The rocks now became fewer, and the water less swift, and finally the canoe glided along so serenely that she took her seat, and managed its course at ease.

"Thank God I am out of that peril—out of Wild Ivan's cruel clutches!" she gasped, as she was borne along, and she couldn't see no signs of pursuers. "If I can only get out onto the prairie where I can get a glimpse of the sun, I shall know which way to start to find Deadwood."

For perhaps an hour she floated around, having only occasionally to use the paddle to keep the canoe steady.

Presently the gorge began to grow a trifle wider, and in a few moments more her boat glided along between two level tree-fringed shores, upon one of which she was horrified to discover several figures, which were dusky and undistinguishable on account of the falling night, sitting about and arranging camp, while others were building a rousing fire. And one man was at the water's edge, making his ablutions.

She could not hope to pass without discovery.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE GLADE—CHOOSING FOR LIFE AND DEATH.

Old Avalanche and Deadwood Dick descended the mountain-side rapidly. The old scout found that Jagers had not kept to the old bear-path, but had diverged and gone more directly down the declivitous hill, leaving a trail, however, that was easily followed.

Dick followed at a short distance in the rear, as much on the alert, perhaps, as the Annihilator himself.

"That Jagers is a cuss!" Avalanche remarked, as they went along. "He ar' a pestiferous beast, noted fer as many peccoliarities as a frolicsome goat—like my Florence Night-in-a-gale, fer illustration; thet is, ef he's a detective, an' sumhow et strikes me he is."

"What grounds have you for such suspicion?" asked Dick, thoughtfully.

"Ken't eggsactly explain, boyee, only I've got a consarned idee thet he belongs ter thet set o' durned scullions as make er livin' by pryin' inter other people's bizness. I once knowed one o' them fellers up in Wyoming, an' he war a teetotal cuss, ef evyer thar was one."

"His name was Tom Plummer, an' yer put him on thet trail o' ennything, an' he was bound ter rut et out. But he got arter thet young road-agent, Jack Sheppard, Jr., an' one mornin' we found his head a settin' on top o' a fence-post, but couldn't find nary a shadder o' his carcass!"

"Jack Sheppard, Junior, eh?" quoth Dick, as they came to a halt, at a motion from the guide. "I once read in a yellow-covered book of Jack Sheppard the highwayman. Is this Junior a chip from the old block?"

"Great Zebulom Zack, yes. He beats all cusses for true cussedness thet evyer I lit onter. But, drop-

pin' thet subject, hayr we be at a lattitude an' longytoad constigeous ter our beasts an' birds o' prey. They're ahead, cooped down inter this thicket, ef ther old boss kicks geographically, an' I ruther think she do."

"Why do you think they're in this thicket?" demanded Dick, peering into the dense wilderness of young maples, which were grown so closely together as to render a passage between them exceedingly difficult.

"Why do I? Waal, as ther hen sed o' ther skunk, I smell 'em. Just open your nostrils an' inhale a good sniff o' thes 'ere boreal atmosphere."

Deadwood Dick obeyed, but could scent nothing but what was peculiar to the woodland—nothing calculated to betray the presence of humans other than themselves.

"Ye don't smell nuthin'?" questioned Avalanche, watching narrowly. "Waal, thet's because yer powers o' perfumery alre faint. Now, w'en ye've lost yer ears, like this devastatin' old disease o' ther peraries, yer smellin' faculties wull become more acute. Now, I smell terbuccer smoke, which tells me thet Thomas Jeff. Jagers alre in thes 'ere thicket—so come erlong, an' we'll investigate matters."

"But hold, scout; if this man is a detective, I may be the very chap he is searching after; besides, I have no desire to come in contact with Leone, my wife."

"Bosh! fiddle-dee-dee, boy; you'll cum around all right wi' ther gal; an' as fer thet Jagers, he'll not give away any o' his free lunch while yer uncle's soarin' in ther boreal atmosphere. Come along; none o' yer funny bizness;" and the next moment the Annihilator had plunged into the thicket.

Deadwood Dick followed with some reluctance, for he dreaded a meeting with Leone; with Jagers it was different. He was a man, and could be dealt with accordingly.

He dreaded to meet Leone, for fear he should be harsh and cruel, where heretofore he had been kind and loving—for her one act had imblittered his heart toward her, and he no longer looked upon her as a true, faithful and loving little wife.

Avalanche pushed ahead through the brush and thicket of saplings with grim determination, and at last came into a very small opening in which, as he had prophesied, Jagers and the girls were seated, the detective puffing away reflectively at his pipe, while Edith and Leone were occupying positions in front of him.

But he sprung to his feet with a curse as the veteran Annihilator and Dick made their debut, and there also came a cry of astonishment from Edith and Deadwood Dick's wife—the first a cry of surprise and joy—the other a cry of surprise, wonder and indignation.

"Hello! halt, there!" commanded Jagers, drawing and cocking a pair of formidable-looking revolvers. "What do you want? Ha! by my soul! it is Old Avalanche, the guide!"

"Yes, Thomas Jeffersonian, et's thet same old contagious eppydemic—thet whoopin', roarin' boreal disease o' devastation w'at patrols thes 'ere hemispherical lattytudes an' longytoads."

And the old man stalked fearlessly forward, followed by young Harris, despite the fact that the muzzles of the two grim six-shooters were leveled upon them threateningly.

"Well, what brings you here?" again demanded Jagers, his tone not the most pleasant imaginable. "And who is that young fellow with you?"

"I can best answer that last question, pilgrim!" replied Dick, fearlessly exposing himself. "I am that notorious young reprobate people call Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road, at your service."

Had a bomb exploded at his feet just then, or an angel descended from cloudland, the detective could not have been more astonished.

"You Deadwood Dick?" he gasped, turning white and red by turns.

"I happen to represent that amiable young gentleman," was the laughing reply, something of Dick's old reckless self returning at the moment. "Apparently, the intelligence affects you disagreeably!"

"No, young man; on the contrary, it affects my *purse* quite agreeably; for if you are Deadwood Dick, then I, as a detective of the U. S. Secret Service, and by that power vested in me, do arrest you for highway robbery and high-handed murder!"

Saying which, the Secret Service man advanced a pace, then paused—hesitated, as he caught a glimpse of the strange fire that burned in the eye of Deadwood Dick—a fire that seemed poisonous.

"(Great ham-bone that dislocated ther larynx of Old Joner!)" came from the Annihilator. "Jest punctuate whar ye be, Tommis Jefferson, of ye valley thet aire cranium ther Lord bequeathed ye. Jest step ont'er a period or a exclamation p'int, an' let thet suffles, ef ye don't expressly desire ter rub yer constitution ag'in a stake; for I'm tellin' ye thet Dick's a cuss—a regylar, dubbel-axion compressed brick, infused wi' ther essence o' distilled devil an' white lightnin'! Why, sir, thar's the time over in Deadwood, when old Niz Warley split in his face, 'ca'se Dicky hayr refused ter absorb moisture, an' jes' 's true 's ther boyee stands thar, sir, all he did war ter wink thet left eye o' his'n, an' Warley war knocked stiff wi' a stroke o' paralyssister, and kedn't move till Dick winked his right eye, when he war all right ag'in, *fact!*"

Only one person laughed, and that was Dick. He stood facin' Jagers with that provoking dauntless-ness characteristic of him, one hand laid upon a revolver butt, the other hanging by his side. He was calm and cool, even when facin' death.

Jagers stood undecided—Edith and Leone had sprung to their feet, the former pale and anxious, the latter watching even as the eagle watches its prey before making a downward swoop. Avalanche occupied a side position in the scene, and his hand also gripped a revolver, for he was resolved that no harm should come to young Harris, to whom he had taken a sudden liking.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" demanded Dick, after a full minute's silence. "The situation is becomin' monotonous. If you have an idea you would like to take me, why sail in and do it—if you are confident that you *can!*"

"You are my prisoner. Five thousand dollars is the price set upon your head, and I have been sent out here to arrest you for your various crimes!" replied Jagers, impressively. "You will find it to your advantage to yield without attempted resistance."

"Yes, marm!" was the laconic reply. "Wouldn't you like me to bind and gag myself, and go and deliver myself to the Deadwood authorities, stating that you were entitled to the reward. Wouldn't that be nice, now?" And Deadwood Dick's wild laugh literally made the walkin' ring.

"I ask nothing of the kind. All I want is that you offer no resistance. As a gentleman, you will grant my request."

"Come on, then, and test the qualities of a thorough Black Hills gentleman, if you think to find fools plenty, sir detective," replied Dick, coolly. "That man who will tamely yield to another, be he villain or saint, is a cowardly dog, in my opinion."

"Great ham-bone that perpared Joner's obituary! an' mine, too!" declared Avalanche; "a feller's ken't hold his own side o' ther whistle-tree ain't cast fer these peraries. Tommis, I'd advise ye ter adopt old Horse Graeley's advice—only be sure an' turn yer heels toward ther settin' sun."

"I am not taking advice at present, old man!" Jagers replied stiffly. "Come! sir road-agent, will you give up without useless resistance?"

"When the crows come home, yes!" responded Dick, with a chuckle. "Now, see bree, detective, this case is quite plain. You, as a representative of justice, are desirous of adding my name to your list

of conquests, and I, as a free and easy-going road-agent—though, henceforth I lay no claim to that profession—am equally desirous that you shall not; which leaves only one way to settle the case."

"Exactly. And that way is—"

"Death! It must be either your life or mine. If the lot fall to me, I'm willing to pass in my checks. Life no longer holds any fascination for me, since the treachery and baseness of yonder woman, my wife. If you are elected to death, you must chaw her down like a man. Do you accept?"

"Yes. Name the plan."

"It is this. Here are a full deck of cards. Avalanche will shuffle them; then we will each draw until one of us gets the ace of spades. The other man must then place a revolver muzzle in his mouth, whereupon the lucky winner will pull the trigger."

Jagers bowed. He was desperate—something seemed to tell him he was going to win; it was life or death, anyhow.

Old Avalanche shuffled the cards, and placed them upon an old stump.

"Thar ye aire, gentlemen. Pull away, an' ther Lord go with ther unlucky one as don't git ther spades."

Jagers reached forth and took the top card, with a laugh. It was the Queen of Diamonds.

Deadwood Dick took the next, and thus the drawing continued. The pack began to diminish in size very rapidly; still that fatal ace of spades remained undrawn.

"Great ham-bone that wrecked ther constitoochin o' Joner!" gasped the Annihilator, watching with most intense interest. "Pull thet spade, Dicky, ef ye vally ther stars an' stripes. Don't let thet Jeffersonian git it, or ye're a goner, sure's thar's insects in thes 'ere air!"

"It matters little to me who gets it, old man," replied Dick, carelessly. "As I said before, life no longer holds that fascination for me that it once did. We've all got to contribute to the great eternal debt, some time—a few hours, days or years make but little difference to one whose life another has rendered unhappy."

"Thet's ther moral an' the religious truth, boy," replied the Annihilator. "I've known incidents already whar henpecked husbands would go an' swaller bed-bug p'izen or arsenic, or sum sich, jest ter relieve 'em o' their domesticated deefikittles. Sad aire the fate o' ther man who hitches himself inter harness wi' a female woman—sadder'n a two-year old humble-bee w'at's bin takin' a Turkish bath in sour buttermilk, or a South Car'liny 'tater-bug thet's underwent a course o' bulldozin' by Kansas grasshoppers—*yes, sires!*"

Edith and Leone were intensely interested and most anxious spectators.

Leone perceived now, for the first, that her jealousy and unwomanly act had rendered Deadwood Dick perfectly reckless—that he was angry, and regarded her as little better than a traitor; and then came the sweeping knowledge of her wild passionate love for him, and the fear that she had gone too far—too far for her to hope for redemption.

But what could she do? Jagers had bound her hands and feet, and she was unable to move. In desperation she turned to Edith, who stood close by, pale and trembling, hoping against hope that Deadwood Dick would draw the fatal ace of spades.

"Girl!" Leone whispered, an awful horror welling up into her eyes, "you love that man—my husband; I know it, so make no denial. For the love of God, then, snatch away the cards, and prevent a murder. Quick, or you will be too late!"

Edith heard and heeded, even though she was growing faint and dizzy.

She sprang forward to do the act of mercy—the last act for him she loved so well, but, grim and immovable, the Annihilator stood in her path and put her back.

"No ye don't, gal!" he said, in his rough but kind

way. "No foul gougins. Don't be oneasy, tho', fer Dicky's ther lad thet's sure ter flop ther ace, you bet!"

Three cards lay upon the stump, and it was Dick's draw. Coolly, self-possessed, fearlessly he picked up one.

It was the three-spot clubs.

Jaggers drew the next, and there was a devilish jubilation in his face as he held up—the ace of spades!

All saw it; Deadwood Dick bowed his acknowledgment of defeat, not changing a particle in color; Avalanche groaned—he had so missed his calculations; Edith and Leone both screamed, the latter bursting into violent sobs.

"You have won!" Deadwood Dick said, calmly, drawing and cocking one of his revolvers, "and my life shall pay the forfeit. Leone, my wife, may you lead a happier life with some one else, and find a truer mate. Miss Stone—Avalanche, fare thee well, and remember the poor fool clothed in the guise of Deadwood Dick!"

Then, there, when the setting sun was shooting its last lingering rays of light into the thicket glade, the young Prince of the Road thrust the revolver muzzle into his mouth, and motioned for Jaggers of the U. S. Secret Service to pull the fatal trigger!

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVAGE ALLIES—FATHER AND SON—REUNION.

ABOUT the same hour that has witnessed the events last described, Wild Ivan, the Boy Fiend, was galloping through the level tract of country at the base of the mountain foothills, mounted upon his thoroughbred black, his dusky face dark and grim, his lips set in firm compression, his eyes gleaming evilly. What was he doing here so far from the stronghold of the Brotherhood. Surely some mischief is afoot.

And ere long its nature became manifest, for when the night shades were gathering around him thickly, and the young moon for the first thrust its crescent up over the western horizon, he drew rein in an Indian encampment, in the heart of a little *milie* of cottonwood timber on the prairie.

A bright fire burned in the center of the camp, which was surrounded by some six or eight skin lodges, and gathered around the fire were at least a hundred savages, among whom two appeared to exert the power of chieftaincy. All were clad in half-civilized garb, and well armed, and it was evident they were a party of loafing vagabonds detached from some other tribe of red-men.

But the two chiefs seemed to recognize Wild Ivan, and one, who spoke wonderful English for a red-skin, welcomed the Boy Fiend heartily.

"Panther berry glad to see you," he said, making room upon a log by the fire. "Been keeping braves in waiting for three days—eber since got whipped by road-agent hunters."

"Yes, I expected to find you here," replied the young outlaw, running his eye over the assembled braves. "And I have come to talk with ye about these same road-agent hunters. We must clear them out!"

"Ugh! Boy chief speak true berry much. White dogs kill many ob Panther's braves. He take um scalps. He roast 'em!"

"Good for you, Rivers!" the young Fiend replied, enthusiastically, "and I have still another plan. You are of course aware of the existence of the so-called Brotherhood of Death?"

"Yes. Panther heard much about de pale-face devils."

"Well, I have been elected chief of said Brotherhood, in the place of Bill Blood, deceased. But I don't like their style, and as they have an immense treasure somewhere, I propose to lay them all out, and then hunt the treasure. Listen!"

And then, in a low tone, the Boy Fiend unfolded his plot to the chief, who listened, eagerly, occasionally giving vent to his approval by a grunt or a nod.

Half an hour later, Ivan mounted his horse and rode back over the route he had come. Occasionally, as he galloped along, he would chuckle to himself, and his eyes would gleam brighter. But by and by his thoughts were rarely interrupted.

In passing through a sparse patch of timber, his horse was suddenly seized by the reins, and jerked back upon its haunches, nearly unseating the rider. Quickly he drew a revolver, but it was knocked from his hand an instant later, while a man stood by his side, one of the same deadly instruments in his hand, leveled, and at full cock.

"Hold on, young man!" cried the stranger, resolve expressed in his tone. "None of your pretty capers. Just be quiet and reasonable, and all will go well!"

The Boy Fiend started violently at sound of the man's voice, and bent forward, endeavoring to peer into the face which the darkness hid from view.

"Oh! you needn't look so sharp; it's me—your father!" declared the unmistakable voice of Colonel Grafton Stone. "I've been on the hunt for you ever since you massacred our train, and killed your own mother!"

"Ha! did the old lady turn up her toes, then? Well I'm sorry, but it couldn't be helped, you know!" was the young wretch's indifferent observation. "The Brotherhood of Death never do things by halves. Pity they hadn't wiped you out at the same time, you old villain!"

"You are kind in your wishes," sneered the elder Stone. "They would have undoubtedly killed me, had I not played possum, as Avalanche did. But, boy, have you seen the girl?"

"The girl?"

"Yes—ha! I remember, now; you took her from the train, before I fainted. What became of her?"

"Oh! you refer to my amiable cousin, eh? Well, I know nothing of her. I got chased, and had to drop her. A young devil named Deadwood Dick appropriated her, I expect!"

"The devil! I would not have lost her for a fortune. Indeed, a fortune is dependent upon her recovery."

"How d'ye mean? I fail to comprehend," the young outlaw said, eagerly.

"Listen, then, and I will tell you. When my brother went to Europe, he was only well-to-do in the world, and left behind him his daughter, at the time placed in a private boarding-school, where she was receiving the finishing touches of her education. In Europe Milt was most fortunate in speculation, and in two years had secured a fortune of a million dollars.

"Then I became envious, and laid a plan to rob him of a part of this wealth. Of our family there were three brothers, Milt, William and myself, and Milt proved to be the least scoundrel of the three. Bill came West, years ago, and as Bill Blood, a ruffian, achieved a reputation second to none. My pedigree—well, it is not wholly spotless."

"For once you speak the truth," replied the Boy Fiend, with a heartless laugh. "You are a devil on earth, and I'm no better!"

"Well, however that might be," continued the colonel, "as I said before, I planned to obtain some of Milt's wealth which, as I looked at it, was rightfully mine.

"He had left me in charge of his estates, on his departure for Europe, and by forging his name I converted them all into cash, stole his daughter, and brought her to our home in Cincinnati, and thence to Cleveland where you first met her. Milt returned and got wind of my villainy, and set officers on my track; so I had to clear out and come West. You remember the young scout, Tornado Tom, who met the girl in Cincinnati and fell in love with her? He is along, also."

"Yes, curse him. Had he not turned her young head, I might have stood a better chance!" growled the youth, savagely.

"Well, never mind, my son. With your co-operation, we can yet get the girl, and I will bleed the

purse of Milton Stone to its utmost limit, while you can take sweet revenge upon her for jilting you."

"Good! all men, it shall be as you say. But you must first accompany me to my stronghold, where I have other work to do."

After some further consultation, the vile father was mounted upon the back of the horse behind his viler son, and the twain rode away toward the mountain stronghold of the Brotherhood of Death.

We left Alice La Rue drifting down the Little Madras, in sight of the camp upon the shore, and in a state of alarm at her situation. Her recent escape from peril had left her quite unmanned, and now she was again thrown into a state of excitement.

Were those upon the shore enemies?

This was a question of great moment to her. Friends she would gladly greet, but enemies she had no desire to encounter.

For a moment she checked the progress of her canoe with the paddle, at loss how to act. If she attempted to pass the camp she would be discovered. She could not retrace her way up the stream on account of its swiftness; the opposite bank was high and beetling, so that she could not scale it.

At last, in desperation, she drove the frail craft forward over the waters with a strong stroke, resolved to make the venture of passing.

But the man at the water's edge saw her, and gave a shout that brought his companions to his side.

"Hello, thar!" shouted a man's voice; "slow up, gal. Whar ye goin'?"

The thought suddenly flashed across the fugitive's brain that they were a part of the terrible Brotherhood, and with firm, compressed lips she used her paddle the faster.

On over the water the canoe shot, yielding gracefully to the fair rower's strokes.

"By Jerusalem!" cried Jolly Jack, who with Sherwood, Red Kit and the other road-agent hunters, stood upon the bank and gazed in wonder at the flying oarswoman. "Et's a durned likely-lookin' white gal, sart'in sure. What on 'arth kin she be doin' up in this outlandish region?"

No one answered; all were too intent in gazing at the beautiful maiden in the boat. But suddenly, as Alice half-turned her white, scared face toward them, Red Kit gave vent to a yell that made the mountains ring.

"It's Alice!" he cried, dancing around excitedly—"It's my gal—Alice, surer 'n preachin'. Stop her, some one!"

And the next instant the hunter leaped out into the stream, and swam desperately in pursuit of the canoe, yelling at the top of his lungs.

Cheering him on, a number of the rangers set out on a run along the shore, adding their shouts to the howls of the swimmer, and thereby increasing the terror of poor Alice, who, ignorant that she was pursued by friends instead of enemies, exerted herself to the utmost to keep her frail craft under swifter motion than her pursuers.

"Keep 'er a-goin', Kitsu!" roared Jolly Jack, from the shore. "Ye'r' bound ter win ther race! Great Columbia! whar's the gal?"

Alice was suddenly and mysteriously gone from her seat in the canoe.

"She's laid flat, Injun fashion!" cried back Red Kit. "But I'll soon let her know she can't foolish wif her daddly."

Rapidly he swam on, and unaided by paddle, the canoe merely rode along with the waves.

Soon he was near enough to grasp a hold of the shell, and the next moment he gazed over into it with an expectant grin.

But a yell of astonishment simultaneously pealed from his lips, as he made the startling discovery that the canoe was empty and—*Alice was gone!*

And where was she gone?

This question none of the rangers could solve, be-

cause none of them had seen her leap swiftly from the boat into the stream, over which the shroud of night had fallen; none saw her, and consequently she was enabled to reach the shore, which at this point she found accessible.

Once upon terra firma she breathed freer, and pausing she wrung the water from her garments.

Across the stream which had here attained considerable width, she could distinctly hear the yells of those she imagined to be her enemies.

"Thank Heaven I have escaped again," she murmured, shivering from the effects of her cold bath. "I only hope I can reach the prairies before day-dawn; there danger is not so thick as in these mountains."

After assuring herself that no one had witnessed her escape, she stole silently away down the shore, which gradually grew wilder and was covered with thickets and scraggy timber.

The darkness was intense and it was only by a sense of feeling that she could drag herself along, but she kept on, resolutely, resolved to move until her strength gave out.

And it was not long until this climax was reached: and, utterly fatigued and exhausted, she was forced to pause and rest. Dropping upon the leaves at the foot of a great cottonwood, she soon felt the drowsiness of coming slumber stealing over her, and unable to shake off the spell, it was not many moments ere she was sound asleep.

How long she had slept she knew not, but she awakened with a start, to find herself in strange surroundings. She had been reclining upon a bundle of blankets, near a ruddy fire, that sent out great warmth, and over the fire a haunch of savory venison was roasting, emitting a peculiar flavor that greeted her sensitive nostrils most agreeably.

The cooking process was under the charge of a sturdy, bewhiskered man, seeing which she glanced around to discover a group of a dozen others, in another portion of the camp engaged in earnest conversation.

One of these men came hastily forward when it was seen that she had aroused from her slumber, and she had the satisfaction of seeing that they were none of the Brotherhood.

And the nearer the man came the more familiar grew his looks, until at last she sprung to her feet with a glad, joyous cry.

"Father! father!"

"Guess so, gal!" and Red Kit clasped the fair girl in a loving embrace.

"Didn't never expect ter see ye ag'in, my rosebud."

"But, how came I here?" Alice demanded, in wonderment. "The last I remember was of dropping down upon a pile of leaves under a great tree, where I must have fallen asleep."

"So you did, gal, an' I snook up an' fetched ye inter camp," replied Red Kit, dancing and capering about like an animated school-boy.

Then followed explanations in general between parent and child, both of whom were overjoyed at their reunion.

Grim Scott Sherwood and Jolly Jack soon came up and were introduced, and from the first it might have been noticed that Alice's wondrous beauty and winning ways had made an impression upon the former, for his eyes lighted up when she chatted to him, and something of his habitual grimness wore away.

CHAPTER XIV.

NOT DICK—THE PARTING.

"Hold on, for the love of God do not kill my husband, sir!" cried Leone Harris, as Tom Jagers stepped forward to perform his part of the death duel. "Have mercy—spare him for my sake!"

"No, madam!" replied the detective, a grim smile of triumph overspreading his features, "I cannot desist, even for your sake. There is a reward of four thousand dollars offered for the head of Dead-

wood Dick, and who has a better right to earn it, than I?"

He sprung forward, and made a pass at the pistol, whose muzzle was within the teeth of the young road-agent, but simultaneously there was the sharp report of a pistol, and the Secret Service man went to the ground in a heap.

He gave only one gasp—then his features grew set in expression, his eyes glassy, and limbs rigid, and he was dead. But who was the assassin?

This question was evidently answered as Old Avalanche restored a still smoking revolver to his belt.

"You!" cried Harris, grimly.

"Great ham-bone thet Joner chawed ther meat from, yes!" replied the Annihilator, screwing his visage into a comical grin. "Et went ag'in' my natur' ter see ye drapped out o' time, so I jest concluded ter electrify thet detective cuss. No offense, I hope."

"Certainly none on my account. But it was hardly fair play, takin' the feller off in that style."

"Ken't see it so, boyee. 'All fair in love or war,' they say. Anyhow thet's w'at Sial Clisby told my brother Josiah, w'en he kicked him down-stairs because he had stayed too late a-courtin' Matilda Jane, an' Josiah sed he waz pretty well convinced afore he reached ther fust landin' thet it war."

"Is he really dead?" asked Edith, coming timidly forward, and gazing sorrowfully at the stiffening form of the Secret Service man.

"Yes, Miss Eda—de'der'n a baked clam aise thet representative o' ther U. S. S. S. I put a punctuation p'int right in over his left temple, an' he flopped his trump keerd, immegetly. Oh! I'm a rooster, gal

a great devastatin' disease thet sweeps like a small sized earthquake over these boreal lattytoods an' loneytoads. Sorry ter displace ther revivations o' Tommises caller, but I hed ter give Dicky hayr a life insurance policy, ye parseeve. An' ef them pretty eyes o' yourn don't lie, I speculate you ain't at all sorry ther boyee's still among ther saints on earth. Hey, little gal?—an' ther same ter you, Mrs. Deadwood Dick."

Edith blushed, and her heart beat faster, for she was conscious that the eyes of the young Prince of the Road was upon her. Why was it, that whenever she was in his presence her whole being was thrilled with such a strange ecstatic feeling—a grand overpowering sensation of joy—a sensation of happiness almost sublime?

Poor girl! Hopelessly she had allowed herself to drift on, not for a moment reckoning the cost—her mad love for this youthful outlaw burning brighter each moment, and gaining strength when it should have been crushed out of existence.

Ay, she blushed at the words of the old scout, but it was the blush of love—and her eyes lit up wondrously, as she replied:

"I am very glad, indeed, that he has escaped so terrible a fate, even at the cost of another life!"

And the glance that she darted at Deadwood Dick thrilled him, strong as was his command over his emotions. If men are "the sterner sex," it is sometimes rather hard to frown down the fascination of a pretty woman; and so Dick found it. Before him were two women—girls, rather, of opposite temperaments; Leone, he loved with a tender, never-tiring devotion; Edith, he saw, loved him with girlish impetuosity, and while he was secretly pleased, he was resolved that no word, look or action should be given her as encouragement.

"I am thankful to escape death, my friends," he said candidly. "I would not be human, if otherwise. It seems that my life of late has been one continuous series of escapes, and surely I ought to be thankful to my God for all extended merces, and I am. Henceforth may no spot be put upon the name of Edward Harris, for from this day he is no longer a road-agent—no longer an outlaw, if his fellow-men will let him alone. Avalanche, please bear me witness to this declaration.

"If they will let me alone, I pledge my word—

and God knows I never yet willingly broke it—that I will leave them alone—*them*, the people. But if they strike me on account of the past, I will strike them back—to the *de a h*!"

"Bully like fer you, boyee! Great ham bone thet demoralized Joner! course I'll bear ye witness, an' any one't sez ye ain't the durndest young galoot as ever rid a jack-mule, 's a dasted ornery liar, an' hayr's ther great Norweegan snow-flake as kin back it—ther orful, cavortin', rampageous Avalanche o' annihilation thet cum down ter inoculate ther disease o' extermination hayr'bouts, on ther back uv O Rory Borey Alice."

Deadwood Dick bowed, and restored his revolver to its holster, while he drew a keen knife in place. Stepping forward, he quickly cut Leone's bonds, and assisted her to rise.

"Thank you," she said, simply. Something warned her to make no display of emotion. "You are kind."

Then, when tears were swelling into her eyes, and she would have turned away, Deadwood Dick spoke to her—in the cold, measured tones she had feared—expected, yet hoped would not come—from him whom she now realized she loved—*worshipped*.

"Leone," he said, detaining her by that one word, "I would speak with you before you go. Right here our paths in life must diverge; you to go one way, and I another. You need not ask me why, Leone, for you know full well. Your jealousy led you into the commission of an act that no true, loving wife would have done. I did not mind the imprisonment—it was only the *sting*, occasioned by the thought that you had put me there. Had it been for your good, I would have willingly remained there a lifetime."

Here the voice grew hoarse, and a moisture gathered in his eyes, while Leone burst into tears.

"Oh! Ned I am sorry—so sorry. Forgive me and take me back—oh! for the love of God, do not desert me!"

"In our separation I am not deserting you, Leone!" Deadwood Dick went on, calmly, though it was perceptible how much he was agitated. "It was you who deserted me. I, too, am sorry, for my own sake and for yours. We were very happy together, until—until—until—"

"This girl came and stole your love away from me!" burst forth Leone, hotly. "Oh! that the thing was dead!"

It was Edith's turn now to cry, for she well knew that she was the cause of this unhappiness.

"Miss Stone did not steal my love away, Leone," Dick went on. "That woman never was born who could win my love from you. You were blindly, intensely jealous, and owe this parting to yourself. I will shoulder part of the blame, and so let us part. At the grotto you can find a home, and you know where my gold is concealed. Take it and my blessing, for it is all I have to give you."

"Oh! my God! do not leave me, husband," sobbed Leone, piteously, falling upon her knees and bowing her head upon her hands. "I am sorry, and acknowledge my fault. But I love you as much as I ever did, and it will kill me if you leave me."

"I fear no serious results, or I should not leave you. You are yet young, and life opens up a bright future for you, for in leaving you, I give you your maiden liberty. Worry whoever it pleases you, and have no fear that I shall ever enforce my claim."

Then, after imprinting a kiss upon the forehead of the weeping girl wife, he turned to Avalanche:

"Old man, I am grateful to you, and would like to continue our acquaintance. But as it is your duty to see to the safety of Miss Stone, I will leave you till you dispose of her."

"Kareet, Dicky, but I want ter see ye ag'in, in a few days, fer I've a speculation I want ye ter fine me in, whar thar's heeps o' fun an' money. Meet me ten days fruin now at Bell creek ford, at sunset. Then we'll cuss and discuss matters at length."

"Well, then, so be it. Now, good-by."

Saying which the young man gave his hand to the Annihilator, who wrung it heartily, and then to Edith, who was weeping softly to herself.

"Good-by, Miss Stone," Dick said, scarcely returning the warm pressure of her hand. "I am sorry your visit to the West has resulted so inauspiciously, and hope that you will soon forget these painful matters."

Edith did not reply. She was too full for utterance, and as Dick passed on to Leone, her sobs broke out afresh, and she wept as though her heart would break.

Dick took Leone's hand in his, and again kissed her upon the forehead tenderly.

"Do not cry, little woman," he said, even though there were tears in his own voice. "Bear up, and God will bless you, as I always shall. Your wants shall ever be provided for, and I will some time write to you. There, now, cheer up, and for the sake of our little future Deadwood Dick, be brave!"

Then came a last passionate kiss, and yearning embrace; then as the shadows thickened in the valley and crept up the mountain-side, Deadwood Dick was gone—gone, and left behind him two sobbing women, who loved him with a wild love that was in itself a worship.

It was some moments after his departure, that Avalanche broke the spell, in his rude, uncouth way:

"Come! come! gals! Great ham-bone that bulldozed old Jone! thar's no use a-bullerin' over one gone 'coon. Thar's plenty o' more trout in ther stream o' matrimony, an' two sich likely-lookin' females as ye aise, orter know how ter snatch 'em bultheaded! Moss in ther bulldozes! I've seen gals' hearts busted inter infinity, an' then patched tergether, jes' 's good as new. Thar war old Sally Usher, fer instance. She war trotted inter ther Cupid's harness twenty-three times, an' each husband got divorced afore they had ther hunnymoon out, on account o' ther excessive length o' her tongue. But ther gal kept a stiff upper lip, an' last I heard uv her, she was 'ras'lin' w' Judge Binkerton, up in Yankton, fer her twenty-fourth!"

Neither Edith nor Leone made answer to this little speech. Both were too wrapped up in their own sorrow to pay heed to his words.

The sobs of the agonized women were so pitiful, that Old Avalanche was forced to turn away, a moisture in the eyes that perhaps had not been dimmed with tears before in many a long year.

"Don't cry, little woman," he said, approaching and laying one great, horny palm upon Leone's head—"don't take it so much to heart. Ther boyee loves you, I'm dasted sart'in, an' I an' him aise goin' ter be tergether a gude deal in ther future, an' ef ther devastatin' eppidemic ken't persuade him thet ye're a repentant luvvin' angel, why my old Florence Night-in-a-gale ken't butt—that's all!"

"Oh! girl! will you then send him back to me?" the poor thing demanded, looking up imploringly, while tears coursed down her fair cheeks. "You will try?"

"Yes, gal—great ham-bone that kerflummixed Jone, yes. Ef I don't use my influence on ther boy, may I be eternally bulldozed! Thus awareth an' declareth Old Avalanche Hogg on this ther twentieth day o' October, 1877, Addy Dominix."

"Oh! thank you, thank you!" Leone cried gladly. "If you will, I will bless you. Oh! Eddie, why did you ever leave me?"

And her sobs burst out afresh.

"Thar! thar! no more cryin', gal. Cheer up, an' git back ter yer grotto. I'll give your spouse a good spankin' an' send him back ter ye."

Then taking Edith by the arm, he silently motioned her to follow him, and they quitted the thick-et glade and hurried on down the mountain-side, leaving Leone to her own grief, alone—alone!

Without a word, for his mind was too busily occupied for speech, the Annihilator led on through the blackness of the night—on until the ragged,

rocky foothills were reached, when they paused for rest.

As they did so, the old scout listened intently, and a grim change came over his face, while he sprang to his feet.

"What is it?" asked Edith, alarm driving away her grief.

"Dunno, gal. Keep still—here!" was the reply, and the next instant he had glided away into the wilderness of bushes, like a dark shadow.

In a few moments he came back, grim and mysterious, his tread as soft as a cat's.

"What is it?" Edith repeated.

"Injuns!" was the startling announcement. "Injuns all around us!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE BROTHERHOOD NO MORE—"INJUNS."

WILD IVAN and his father rode rapidly away to ward the stronghold of the Brotherhood.

"You spoke of this Tornado Tom in a casual way," remarked the Boy Fiend. "Way did you mention him?"

"He, in company with my brother, Milton Stone—has come to this country in search of the girl, Edith. I heard of them as being in Deadwood, and that was a week ago."

"They were not on your trail, then?"

"No, but were scenting after me with the perseverance of a pair of bloodhounds. I expect nothing else than that I shall stumble over them when I least expect it."

"Well, after we again got the gal, we can laugh at them," replied the youth as he urged on his double-burdened steed.

After a long ride through the gorge, and then through the rapids, the camp of the outlaws was reached.

The Brothers outside the cave greeted the return of their chief with a scowling nod, but those gathered around the tables, inside, scarcely noticed him, so apparently engaged were they in their games. Old Blue Bob, however, saluted with a grim smile. He, of the whole lot, admired Ivan.

Wild Ivan led the way into the inner cavern, and here he and the colonel were supplied with food, after which the young chief left his parent to the enjoyment of his pipe, while he rejoined the Brothers at the card-tables in the outer cave.

"Well, mates, what's the word?" he asked pleasantly, accepting a hand which Wagner had dealt him, with a bow. "How has things went, and what is the prospects?"

"Durned poor, captain," the lieutenant replied, half-savagely. "We never hed sech dull times when Bill Blood war boss. He allus hed sumthin' a-stew-in, an' thar war booty ter be had for ther work for et."

"Well you mustn't get discouraged, old fellow. I know things lie rather stagnant just now, but I have laid a trail for you to follow, and there's heaps of money at the end of it!"

"Eh? Say you so?" and the outlaw's swarthy face lit up with enthusiasm. "Out wi' it, captain, fer we're all ears fer good news."

"I thought you would be!" said Ivan, a cynical smile curving his lips. "But, before I tell the good news, summon the rest of the boys, as what I have to say concerns them also."

Blue Bob was dispatched after the remaining outlaws, and soon they were in the cave and given seats at the table.

"Now, then, capt'in, give us yer information," reminded Wagner.

"Exactly," replied the Boy Fiend; "but hold! we cannot go thirsty over such luck. Blue Bob, in the chest in yonder cave, you will find three quart-bottles of old Bourbon whiskey, which I dare say belonged to your former chief. Haul them out here, along with glasses for the crowd, and we will wet our whistles."

Accordingly Blue Bob brought forth the liquor,

and the glasses were filled all around, with the exception of Wild Ivan's.

"A little pure cold water for me, Bob," he said, pushing the bottle aside. "My brain gets confused when I swallow that liquid poison."

His glass was accordingly filled with water; then rising, he proposed a toast in a neat little speech, which was heartily drunk, all around, when a resounding cheer was rendered for the young chief.

To which he bowed his thanks.

"Now, boys," he said, "I'll out with what I have to say, in a few words. As you all know, the two girl captives we should have had, have escaped, but one of these—she whom we got from the train—we may have hopes of retaking. You have all heard of Deadwood Dick, have you not?"

A general murmur of assent came in answer to the question.

"Well, the girl is in the power of this same Deadwood Dick, who, with his band of road-agents are hiding in this same mountain range. And, mates, it must be our object to capture and put to death these road-agents, with the exception of Deadwood Dick, whom I can deliver up to justice, and receive a large reward for."

"How large, captain?"

"The whole amount of rewards offered for him by the government and private citizens figure up to the tune of *ten thousand dollars*!"

A yell of astonishment came from the assembled ruffians.

"This is not all we shall gain, my boys!" the young villain went on, watching the faces around him that were flushed from the effects of the strong liquor.

"They have in their possession money to the amount of over a million dollars, results of their general outlawry and mining, which shall be ours, and go into our treasury!"

Again a cheer went up from the Brotherhood, and at a motion of Ivan's hand, the glasses were all refilled and drank off with great gusto.

"This will swell our big chest yonder in ther corner, 'til it busts, captain!" cried Wagner, pointing to an iron-bound box which the Boy Fiend had never noticed before.

"Then that is the treasury, eh, lieutenant?"

"You b-bet!" was the thick reply, for the man was rapidly succumbing to the influence of the aged whisky, "an' yere's w'at k-kerries the key; but, it's a-all right, ye kno', 'c-'case the b'hoys ain't 'feared ter trust me."

"Of course," assented the young villain, condescendingly; "you're honest as the day is long. But, come! fill up again; only one bottle is empty; let's have a hilarious time on our success that is to come; fill up! fill up! I say, and drive the cursed care away!"

And then, while the outlaws were freely guzzling down the strong liquor, Wild Ivan struck off into a wild, rollicking song of the mountaineer.

But little the Brothers of Death heard of his melody. One by one they dropped off into what appeared to be a drunken sleep, until, with Wagner's tumble from his seat, the last had yielded to the resistless power of the liquor.

Then the Boy Fiend broke out into a wild fit of laughter.

"What! you have not murdered them?" cried Colonel Stone, advancing from the inner cavern. "They are not *dead*!"

"No, not quite, old man, but they don't lack much of it. I'll guarantee they'll never see sunrise. But, come! let's secure this treasure, and then depart, for this atmosphere is poisonous!"

Feeling in a pocket of the senseless Wagner's garments, the young Fiend produced a key, which fitted the great iron-bound chest, and in a moment he had the hasp off, and the lid raised, so that he could gaze in.

But, a howl of rage escaped him when he discovered that the box was *empty*. Had he been cleverly duped?

With curses on his lips he at length prepared to leave the place.

"We will get out of this," he said, "and leave every thing just as it is—dead fools and all. Come!"

He led the way out into the open air, and selected two superb animals out of a dozen that were grazing along the shore. These were duly mounted, and father and son set out down the stream, prairie-ward.

"Now for the girl!" said the Boy Fiend, as they pushed on. "I would like to find her, just now. Wouldn't I tame her though?"

"You would kill her, in your savage ferocity!" was the colonel's reply.

"Injuns! all around us!" repeated Old Avalanche, in his grim way. "Great ham-bone thet discombobberated old Joner! I didn't s'pose thet we'd encounter many o' them, fer we licked 'em like blue blazes, t'other night."

"Oh! what shall we do?" cried Edith, greatly alarmed. She had never seen an Indian, with the exception of a few vagabond reds whom she had met on the way. "What shall we do?"

"Do? Moses in the bullrushes! Why, we'll jest git ont'er our muscle, an' go fer 'em like a great devastatin' eppydemic o' choleric morbus. We'll annihilate an' exterminate 'em like all creation. Ef I put a couple o' my electric whispers in their cranium, they'll imagine a spasmodic 'arthquake has struck 'em."

"Then you have no fear?" asked Edith.

"Fear? Noaher and ther shark, no! ye nevyer see'd old Avalanche afeard o' any thing short o' a reflexion uv his own mug, which ar' frightful, I'll allow. Once on a time, a woman o' the female sex see'd me comin' to'rd her, up in Yankton, an' she war struck wi' a fit o' whisky appoplexy—thet aire, she war purty drunk, an' tuk me fer King Baccous, or sum other sich name, an' durn my ears, ef she didn't faint clean away."

"So fur, in fact, thet she didn't cum to, an' they hed ter pos'pone ther job o' revivin' her till the day of ressureckshun. That ain't a sarcumstance, tho'. A feller in Denver, once, got so skeered at my ugly phiz, thet he war cured ontirely uv ther St. Vitus dance at which he had bin waltzin' for twenty years."

At this juncture the loquacious old veteran suddenly stopped and peered behind him, at the same time drawing his knife.

Edith trembled in fear, for she felt that the moment was at hand for a deadly conflict. But what was her surprise, the next instant, to see the Annihilator suddenly bound high into the air, and turning a complete back-somersets, land direct down in a mass of bushes, which grew a few paces in front of her.

What did this eccentric move mean? She could not solve the problem, except that the scout had seen an Indian concealed there, and had taken this method to surprise him.

A violent struggle was going on, and the hard breathing of the contestants was sufficient evidence that they were closely matched in strength.

But at length there was a deep groan, and the Annihilator emerged from the bushes, a grotesque grin elongating his comical face.

"Great ham-bone thet kerflummixed old Joner!" he gasped, swinging a reeking scalp in the air. "Whoop! hurray fer Noaher an' his shark. One less pensioner on ther U. S. Government; one more stroke o' vengeance fer these lost ears o' mine!"

"Oh! mercy! what is that?" demanded Edith, as her eyes fell upon the bloody trophy of the battle.

"Thet's a red-skin's skulp, gal—a kinder wig wi' which natur' adorned him. I ventured ter lift it. But see here, gal, we must be gittin' out o' this, or thar'll be squinchalations o' business pretty soon. Can ye shute a pistle?"

"I can try, sir. Oh! let's hurry!"

"Don't git in a perspiration," warned Avalanche,

a merry twinkle in his eye, "or et might result disastrously. Hayr's a pistle; take it, an' w'enever ye see a red hellion, let him haver right thru his Abece-darian, kerslap. Don't hev enny skumpassion on ther greasy varlets, fer they're not fit fer a skunk ter wipe his feet on. Cum on, now!"

He handed Edith a cocked revolver, and then led the way on through the wilderness of bushes—on through the blackness of the night that had wrapped the earth in a dense shroud.

"Keerful, gal, keerful; don't step as ef ye was an elerfant tryin' ter create a favorable impression. Fust ye know ye— Great ham-bone that foundered old Joner! *Thet's* yer game, is et, ye durned greasy nigger!" and then followed a terrible struggle and thrashing around through the bushes.

"Grab me by ther shins, will ye, ye red pot scullion! I'll show ye, I will. Luck out fer yer shins, gal, fer thar's Injuns under fut. Thar, durn yer dasted ornery picter, I'll bet ye'r' beyond sayin' kitychisms. Hayr, gal," and again the scout grasped Edith by the arm, and they pushed on.

Suddenly Edith's revolver cracked, and with a wild death-yell a painted savage fell at her feet, his life-blood spreading over the leaves.

"Bully fer ye, gal! Disembodied his speerit fust pop! Sorry he squawked, tho', fer it'll fetch swathers o' ther cantankerous Babylonians down on us."

True enough, the red-skin's death-cry was answered by yells from a score of throats, and the sounds of rushing feet were heard approaching.

"Here, gal!" cried Avalanche, leaping to Edith's side and forcibly slinging her behind his back. "Thar now, slap yer embracers around my gullet, an' freeze ter me like forty hornets after a Georg'y nigger. I'm goin' ter break out o' this deeficulty, an' bu'st thar harness, now, *you* bet!"

And the next moment, with a revolver in each hand, and Edith on his back, he was bounding swiftly down the mountain-side!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE END.

On leaped the veteran scout, grim and resolute, bound to go through if it lay within his power—on with mighty springs and leaps; and right and left the revolvers cracked with deadly effect.

Suddenly the flying Annihilator burst into a little glade where two men were cooking their evening meal over a bright camp-fire, apparently unaware of the close proximity of the red-skins.

"Hello! Great ham-bone that debilitated Joner!" cried Avalanche, astonished at the unexpected spectacle—"white folks, by the skylark o' St. Peter."

"Sayee! ye durned ejotts, settlin' thar like a hatch-in' hen, git up an' *dust*, ef ye vally yere golden tresses. Thar's a hull squirt uv Injuns behind, com-in' on like a streak o' greased electricity erlong ther back o' a sheared mule. Bounce, I say;" and then on bounded the scout, like a rubber ball, across the glade toward the opposite side.

"Father! father!" suddenly screamed Edith, catching a glimpse of the two men by the camp-fire.

"My child—Edith!" came back in joyful tones of recognition. "Come, Elkton; Heaven be praised; the old scout has rescued my child!"

And the two men grasped their weapons and came swiftly in pursuit, while, close in their rear, swarmed a horde of yelling Indians, thirsty for the blood of vengeance.

Fortunately the darkness was too intense for the enemy to gain anything like an accurate aim, and their bullets rattled harmlessly over the fugitives' heads.

"Great ham-bone that floored old Joner!" gasped the Annihilator, as Elkton and Milton Stone came alongside, "things begin ter look ripe fer dissection, don't they? Thank heaven, thar's the Little Madrass, anyhow."

"Then we can hope for aid!" cried Elkton, "for the road-agent hunters are encamped on the other side. See! yonder is their camp-fire!" and he pointed to the opposite side of the creek on whose banks they had suddenly emerged.

"Whoop! ye durned ornery pimps o' Satan! Oum erlong now ef yer want ter breathe an unhealthy atmosphere. Hello! ahoy, there, rangers! ef ye're in a mood for wras'lin' wi' red niggers, show yer hand over this way!"

Not a moment the three men paused, but plunging into the stream, they struck out for the other shore, which they reached in safety, just as the savages burst into view on the bank they had left.

Sherwood, Jolly Jack and his followers had heard the Annihilator's shouts, and came forward to meet the fugitives and conduct them to camp, where, while hurried explanations were being given, and preparations made for defense, Milton Stone took time to embrace his long-lost child, who had passed through so much trouble since last he had seen her.

"Them Injuns have got ern almithey grudge ag'in' us whites," remarked Old Avalanche, as the yells of the red demons on the opposite side of the creek made the night hideous. "They're goin' ter put theyr fust fut for'ard ter oblitcherate us, an' we've got ter luk sharp or they'll do et."

"Let the devils come!" growled Scott Sherwood, in his rough way. "We've got plenty o' powder an' cartridges, an' hain't stingy of 'em, neither. There is fifteen of us, and if we ain't good for a dozen reds apiece, we'd better go into bankruptcy!"

Guards were, by Sherwood's order, posted all around the camp, and the fire was put out.

The yelling of the red-skins had ceased, and a strange silence hung over the night, suggestive of death. All the sounds peculiar to the mountain and forest had become inaudible; a faint prairie breeze wafted silently up through the walls of the lonely gorge.

"The cusses are creepin' up on us," said Old Avalanche, impressively. "I know 'em better'n I do my A, B, C's. They're a dasted pestilence on ther face o' this toadstool."

"Stand ready, boys!" spoke Sherwood, grimly. "Strike true and hard when the time comes. Another victory like that of the other night, and the hounds will not be so fast to fight!"

And soon the moment arrived!

With yells that were deafening the attack began from the land side, and a fierce battle raged, in which the road-agent hunters fought like demons possessed.

But they had fearful odds to fight against.

The savages numbered full three-score, or more, and were constantly urged on by the shouts of three men in their midst—white men, too, judging from their voices, and Old Avalanche made it his business to single them out, as he fought on.

Down went the howling red-skins before the rangers' terrible repeating-rifles like chaff before the wind; now it was easy to see how the battle would end.

"At 'em, boys!" yelled Sherwood, striking death at every blow. "Capture those two white men and the disguised chief by their side. Aha! Tom Rivers, I recognize you, you traitor!"

But, the battle raged on fiercely, and when death had met the last savage, but one captive had been taken alive. And he was the Boy Fiend—Wild Ivan!

He was securely bound to a tree in the center of the camp, and then the victorious rangers rebuilt their camp-fire, and set to work at clearing away the dead.

While engaged at the work, Milton Stone suddenly uttered a cry of pain, and knelt by the side of Colonel Grafton Stone, who had fallen in the battle. He was not quite dead, and he appeared to recognize the brother he had so deeply wronged.

"Forgive me, Milt," he gasped, faintly, "and pray for me and my boy, yonder," with a motion toward Wild Ivan. "We have both sinned—and—"

The death-rattle in his throat checked further utterance, and in a moment he was dead.

Milton Stone uttered a silent prayer over his body, then turned away, weeping.

The dead were all cleared away, and decently buried, for Sherwood was not the man to leave even a dog without a grave. And, then, our little band gathered about the camp-fire, and "counted noses."

Only one of the rangers had been killed and four wounded, which, altogether, was a lucky termination of a battle against such odds.

Edith and Alice were safe, and the whole party soon were in excellent spirits. But, unexpectedly, something occurred, which caused another commotion.

There was a wild yell, a rush of feet, and two figures came flying into the camp—a man and an Indian girl.

"Loo! roo!" shrieked the Cherokee girl, and in an instant she was at Wild Ivan's side, a gleaming knife in her hand, a wild fire burning in her terrible eyes.

The young Fiend recognized her, and a groan escaped his lips, but it was his last, for the next moment the knife sunk into his black heart, and Sue swung his reeking scalp on high, uttering a triumphant war-cry.

"Great ham-bone that foundered old Joner!" cried Avalanche, springing forward. "Josiah Hogg, my brother, true's hens lay hen fruit!"

"Eggs-actly, old boss," returned the poet, with a grim smile. "But you're ther last coon I expected ter stumble ont'er. See hayr," and he pointed to Florence Night-in-a-gale, who stood meekly at his side; "d'ye own this tarnal critter? I found 'im back heer a ways, an' he seemed ter recognize me, on account o' them old days up at Death Canyon, when Wild Edna war ther trump card. As Mora sez—"

"Thar! thar! none o' yer poetry, Josiaher!" remonstrated the Annihilator, imploringly. "I'd rather be rotten-egged, any time, than ter hear it."

"Which shows yer poor appreciation o' ther fine arts," grumbled the eccentric brother.

Explanations were now demanded of Sue's strange conduct, and in his droll way Josiah gave them, winding up with his avowed intention of marrying the girl.

"Ye'd better hitch yerself ter an Injun squaw!" commented Avalanche, in disgust. "Ye're about er fit associate fer 'em; wi' yer poetical perpensties, yer aire!"

The body of Wild Ivan was removed, and Josiah and Cherokee Sue were invited to the hospitalities of the camp. After it was found that there were no further signs of attack, a sentinel was stationed, and the rest turned in for sleep. The next day Josiah and his dusky companion set out for the North.

A week was spent very enjoyably in the camp of the road-agent hunters, who had not yet given up their vain hope of capturing Deadwood Dick; but, then, came a terrible blow which none had expected—which caused a feeling of grief in the camp.

On awakening one morning it was discovered that Edith was not in the lodge where she and Alice usually slept, and Tom Elkton caused a search to be made. And Old Avalanche was the first to discover a clew.

Upon the bank of the rushing, roaring Little Mad-rass, he found a ribbon Edith had worn upon her hair, and also a handkerchief, inside of which was a bit of paper.

In haste the old scout hurried back to the agonized father, and the paper was read aloud to the anxious friends clustered around.

"Do not look for me, for the water will not give up its dead. You will say I am foolish, but I could not give him up, I loved him so. I would rather die, for I could not live without him, and be happy. Avalanche knows—it's about Deadwood Dick. May God forgive me, as I know you will. Poor papa."

"EDITH."

This was all, but it was enough to send a shock of sadness through the camp.

One day later, a sad and sorrowing man, Milton Stone started for Deadwood, eastward bound, while poor Tom Elkton, in whose heart had found firm root a pure devotion for Edith, plunged deeper into the wilderness, seeking for fresh adventure to drown out his sorrow.

Old Avalanche and his goat also took their departure, amid the good wishes of all the rangers, who had learned to regard him as a sterling friend.

And about a week after the camp broke up, and the unsuccessful road-agent hunters set out for Deadwood.

Shortly after their arrival, Sherwood married Red Kit's daughter, Alice.

Their love-making was rather short, but both found a choice in each other, and it is for us to hope that they may ever be supremely happy.

At sunset, ten days after Old Avalanche bade adieu to Deadwood Dick, he might have been seen riding leisurely through the timber skirting Bell creek ford, on the back of his faithful mare, and followed by his eccentric goat, Florence. At the edge of a little opening in the timber he suddenly drew rein, and gazed upon a striking tableau before him.

In the center of the open space, standing proudly erect with folded arms, is that weird youth in black—Deadwood Dick, while at his feet kneels a humble, penitent girl, with eyes upraised pleadingly.

And their words are audible to the old Annihilator—words which cause moisture to dampen the corners of his eyes, despite himself.

"No, Leone, I cannot take you back, so do not ask me. I may seem cruel and heartless, but—"

"You will take me back some day—I am sure of it," she said, rising, the light of faith and love gleaming in her eyes. "And I will wait for you. Kiss me, Eddie!"

Quickly he catches her in his arms, and covers her face with burning kisses—then puts her almost sternly away from him, and blinded with tears she comes toward where the Annihilator has halted. He places his hand upon her arm, and intuition teaches her who it is, even though she raises not her eyes.

"Cheer up, gal, and be hopeful. Things aire workin' fine. Great ham-bone that choked old Joner, yes! It won't be long."

"Oh! God grant that it may not be long!" she sobbed, as she moved on.

Poor Leone!

Deadwood Dick was seated upon his black stallion, and red traces about his eyes betrayed that he had been crying, when the Annihilator joined him.

"Hello! ye're here, eh? Great ham-bone, that's one good thing, fer I hev somethin' to say."

Then followed a long conversation between the two men, and night had long fallen when, after shaking hands, as if to seal some compact, they headed their horses southwestward and galloped away, quitting the scenes of this narrative, which had brought to three hearts such bitterness and pain.

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